THE BROWN STUDY

GRACE · S · RICHMOND

Rachael L

THE BROWN STUDY

Books by the Same Author

Brotherly House
Court of Inquiry, A
Indifference of Juliet, The
Mrs. Red Pepper
On Christmas Day in the Evening
On Christmas Day in the Morning
Red Pepper Burns
Round the Corner in Gay Street
Second Violin, The
Strawberry Acres
Twenty-Fourth of June
Under the Country Sky
With Juliet in England

"Are you tempting me, too?" he asked, with sudden fierceness

The Brown Study

By GRACE S. RICHMOND

AUTHOR OF

"Red Pepper Burns," "Mrs. Red Pepper,"
"The Twenty-Fourth of June,"
"The Second Violin," Etc.

WITH FRONTISPIECE
By HERMAN PFEIFER

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TO
THE LIVING MEMORY
OF
EDWARDS PARK CLEAVELAND

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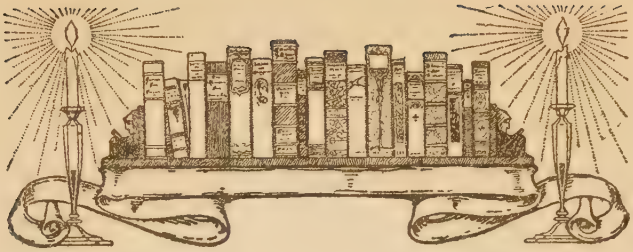
THE BROWN STUDY



I

BROWN HIMSELF

Brown was so tall and thin, and his study was so low and square, that the one in the other seemed a misfit.

There was not much in the study. A few shelves of books—not all learned books by any means—three chairs, one of them a rocker cushioned in a cheerful red; a battered old desk; a broad and rather comfortable looking couch: this was nearly all the study's furniture. There was a fireplace with a crumbling old hearthstone, and usually a roaring fire within; and a chimney-piece above, where stood a few photographs and some odd-looking articles of apparently small value. On the walls were

two small portraits—of an elderly man and woman.

This was absolutely all there was in the room worth mentioning—except when Brown was in it. Then, of course, there was Brown. This is not a truism, it is a large, significant fact. When you had once seen Brown in his study you knew that the room would be empty when he was out of it, no matter who remained. Not that Brown was such a big, broad-shouldered, dominating figure of a man. He was so tall and thin of figure that he looked almost gaunt, and so spare and dark of face that he appeared almost austere. Yet when you observed him closely he did not seem really austere, for out of his eyes, of a clear, deep gray, looked not only power but sympathy, and not only patience but humour. His mouth was clean-cut and strong, and it could smile in a rather wonderful way. As to the years he had spent—they might have been thirty, or forty, or twenty, according to the hour

in which one met him. As a matter of fact he was, at the beginning of this history, not very far along in the thirties, though when that rather wonderful smile of his was not in evidence one might have taken him for somewhat older.

I had forgotten. Besides Brown when he was in the study there was usually, also, Bim. Also long and lean, also brown, with a rough, shaggy coat and the suggestion of collie blood about him —though he was plainly a mixture of several breeds—Bim belonged to Brown, and to Brown's immediate environment, whenever Bim himself was able to accomplish it. When he was not able he was accustomed to wait patiently outside the door of Brown's small bachelor abode. This door opened directly from the street into the Brown Study.

The really curious thing about the study was that nobody in that quarter of the big city knew it was a study. They called the place simply "*Brown's.*" Who Brown himself was they did

not know, either. He had come to live in the little old house about a year ago. He was dressed so plainly, and everything about him, including his manner, was of such an unobtrusive simplicity, that he attracted little attention—at first. Soon his immediate neighbours were on terms of interested acquaintanceship with him, though how they got there they could not themselves have told—it had never occurred to them to wonder. The thing had come about naturally, somehow. Presently others besides his immediate neighbours knew Brown, had become friends of Brown. They never wondered how it had happened.

The Brown Study had many callers. It was by now thoroughly used to them, for it had all sorts, every day of the month, at any hour of the day, at almost any hour of the night.

II

BROWN'S CALLER—ONE OF MANY

A caller had just come stumbling in out of the November murk, half blind with weariness and unhappiness and general discouragement. Brown had welcomed him heartily.

"It's nothing in particular," growled the other man, presently, "and it's everything. I'm down and out."

"Lost your job?"

"No, but I'm going to lose it."

"How do you know?"

"Everything points that way."

"What, for instance?"

"Oh—I can't tell you, so you'd understand."

"Am I so thick-headed?" Brown asked the

question seriously. His eyes, keen, yet full of sympathetic interest, rested inquiringly upon his caller's face.

"It's in the air, that's all I can say. I wouldn't be surprised to be fired any minute—after eight years' service. And—it's got on my nerves so I can't do decent work, even to keep up my own self-respect till I do go. And what I'm to do afterward——"

Brown was silent, looking into the fire. His caller shifted in his chair; he had shifted already a dozen times since he sat down. His nervous hands gripped the worn arms of the rocker restlessly, unclosing only to take fresh hold, until the knuckles shone white.

"There's the wife," said Brown presently.

The caller groaned aloud in his unhappiness.

"And the kiddies."

"God! Yes."

"I meant to mention Him," said Brown, in a

quietly matter-of-fact way. "I'm glad you thought of Him. He's in this situation, too."

The caller's brow grew black. "That's one thing I came to say to you: I'm through with all that. No use to give me any of it. I don't believe in it—that's all."

Brown considered him, apparently not in the least shocked. The caller's clothes were very nearly shabby, certainly ill-kept. His shoes had not been blackened that day. He needed a hair-cut. His sensitive, thin face was sallow, and there were dark circles under his moody eyes.

Brown got up and went out by a door which opened beside the chimney-piece into the room behind, which was his kitchen. He stirred about there for some time, then he invited Jennings out. There were crisply fried bacon and eggs, and toast and steaming coffee ready for the two men—Brown's cookery.

They sat down, and Brown bowed his head.

His companion did not bow his but he dropped his eyes, letting his glance rest upon the bacon.

"*Lord*," said Brown simply, "*we ask Thy blessing on this food. Give us food for our souls, as well. We need it. Amen.*"

Then he looked up at the caller. "Pitch in, Jennings," said he, and set the example.

For a man who professed to have had his supper Jennings did pretty well.

When the meal was over Brown sent Jennings back to the fireside while he himself washed the dishes. When he rejoined his visitor Jennings looked up with a sombre face.

"Life's just what that card a fellow tacked up in the office one day says it is: —'*one damned thing after another*,'" he asserted grimly. "There's no use trying to see any good in it all."

Brown looked up quickly. Into his eyes leaped a sudden look of understanding, and of more than understanding—anger with something, or some one. But his voice was quiet.

"So somebody's put that card up in your office, too. I wonder how many of them there are tacked up in offices all over the country."

"A good many, I guess."

"I suppose every time you look up at it, it convinces you all over again," remarked Brown. He picked up the poker, and leaning forward began to stir the fire.

"I don't need convincing. I know it—I've experienced it. God!—I've had reason to."

"If you don't believe in Him"—Brown was poking vigorously now—"why bring Him into the conversation?"

Jennings laughed—a short, ugly laugh. "That sounds like you, always putting a fellow in a corner. I use the word, I suppose, to——"

"To give force to what you say? It does it, in a way. But it's not the way you use it when you address Him, is it?"

"I don't address Him." Jennings's tone was defiant.

Brown continued lightly to poke the fire. "About that card," said he. "I've often wondered just how many poor chaps it's been responsible for putting down and out."

Jennings stared. "Oh, it's just a joke. I laughed the first time I saw it."

"And the second time?"

"I don't remember. The fellows were all laughing over it when it first came out."

"It *was* a clever thing, a tremendously clever thing, for a man to think of saying. There's so much humour in it. To a man who happened to be already feeling that way, one can see just how it would cheer him up, give him courage, brace him to take a fresh hold."

Jennings grunted. "Oh, well; if you're going to take every joke with such deadly seriousness——"

"You took it lightly, did you? It's seemed like a real joke to you? It's grown funnier and funnier every day, each time it caught your eye?"

But now Jennings groaned. "No, it hasn't. But that's because it's too true to keep on seeming funny."

Brown suddenly brought his fist down on the arm of Jennings's rocker with a thump which made his nerve-strung visitor jump in his chair. "It *isn't* true! It's not the saying of a brave man, it's the whine of a coward. Brave men don't say that sort of thing. The sort of thing they do say—sometimes to other men, oftener to themselves alone—is what a famous Englishman said: '*If you do fight, fight it out; and don't give in while you can stand and see!*' How's that for a motto? If that had been tacked on the wall in your office all this while, would it have made you feel like giving up, every time you looked at it?"

Brown's eyes were glowing. Jennings had slumped down in his chair, his head on his hand, his face partly hidden from his host. There was silence in the room.

Brown kept Jennings overnight, making a bed for him on his couch, where he could see the fire. As Jennings sat on the couch, ready to turn in, Brown came out from his bedroom, a long figure in his bathrobe and slippers, and knelt down before the old rocking-chair. Jennings, in his surprise, sat perfectly still, looking at him. He could see Brown's lean, strong face in profile, the fine head—it was a very fine head, though perhaps Jennings did not appreciate that—a little lifted, the eyes closed. Brown prayed in a conversational tone, as if the One he addressed were in the room above, with an opening between.

Then he rose, a little tender smile on his face, said, "Good-night, old man," and went away into the inner room—the door of which he did not close.

What did he leave behind him? What was in the air? Was this a common room, a homely room, lighted only by a smoldering fire? What was it which suddenly and unaccountably

gripped George Jennings's heart, so that a sob rose in his throat? What made him want to cry, like a schoolboy, with his head on his arms? With all his long misery, tears had never once come to his relief. His heart had been hard and his eyes dry. Now, somehow, he felt something give way.

. . . . .

Jennings slept all night, and came out to breakfast with a queer, shamefaced aspect, yet with considerably less heaviness of foot than he had shown the night before. He ate heartily, as well he might, for the food was extremely appetizing. When he got up to go he stood still by his chair, seeming to be trying to say something. Seeing this, Brown came over to him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Yes, lad?" said he interrogatively. He was smiling and the smile transformed his face, as always.

"I—feel better, this morning," stammered

Jennings. "I—want to thank you. I'm ashamed of the way I talked last night. It was as you said. I knew better, but I couldn't seem to—to——"

Brown nodded. "Of course you knew better," he said heartily. "We all know better. Every man prays—at some time or other. It's when we stop praying that things get dark. Begin again, and something happens. It *always* happens. And sometimes the thing that happens is that we get a good sleep and are able to see things differently in the morning. Good-bye—and come back to-night."

"Shall I?" Jennings asked eagerly.

"Surely. We'll have oysters to-night, roasted on the half-shell over the coals in the fireplace. Like 'em?"

"I never ate any that way," admitted Jennings. "It sounds good." And he smiled broadly, a real smile at last.

"Wait till you try them," promised Brown.

III

BROWN'S BORROWED BABY

On the following Saturday, at five in the afternoon, the previous hours having been filled with a long list of errands of all sorts, yet all having to do with people, and the people's affairs, seldom his own, Brown turned his steps homeward. The steps lagged a little, for he was tired.

At the house next his own—a shabby little house, yet with rows of blooming scarlet geraniums in tin cans on its two lower window sills, and clean, if patched, muslin curtains behind the plants—Brown turned in once more. Standing in the kitchen doorway he put a question:

"Mrs. Kelcey, may I borrow Norah for an hour?"

The person addressed looked up from her work, grinned a broad Irish grin, pushed back a lock of bothersome hair with a soapy hand, and answered heartily:

"To be shure ye may, Misther Brown. I says to mesilf an hour ago, I says, 'Happen he'll come for Nory to-night, it bein' Saturday night, an' him bein' apt to come of a Saturday night.' So I give her her bath early, to get her out o' the way before the bhoys come home. So it's clane she is, if she ain't got into no mischief the half hour."

She dashed into the next room and returned triumphant, her youngest daughter on her arm. Five minutes later Brown bore little Norah Kelcey into his bachelor domain, wrapped in her mother's old plaid shawl, her blue eyes looking expectantly from its folds. It was not the first time she had paid a visit to the place—she remembered what there was in store for her there. She was just two years old, was Norah, a mere

slip of an Irish baby, with a tangled mop of dark curls above eyes of deep blue set in bewildering lashes, and with a mouth like a freshly budded rose.

Brown withdrew the shawl and knelt on the floor before her. Bim, who had welcomed the two with eagerness, sat down beside them.

"You see, Bim," explained his master, "I had to have something human to love for an hour or two. You're pretty nearly human, I know, but not quite. Norah is human—she's flesh-and-blood. A fellow gets starved for the touch of flesh-and-blood sometimes, Bim."

He bent over the child. Then he lifted her again and bore her into his bedroom. Clean and wholesome she was without question, but he disliked the faint odour of laundry soap which hung about her. Smiling at her, playing with her, making a game of it, he gently bathed the little face and neck, the plump arms and hands, using a clear toilet soap with a most delicate sugges-

tion of fragrance. When he brought her back to his fireside she was a small honey-pot for sweetness and daintiness, and fit for the caresses she was sure to get.

Brown sat down with her upon his knee. He had given her a tiny doll to snuggle in her arms, and she was quiet as a kitten.

"Norah," said he, speaking softly, "you are adorable. Your eyes are the colour of deep-sea water and they make havoc with my heart. That heart, by the way, is soft as melting snow to-night, Norah. It's longing for all the old things, longing so hard it aches like a bruise. It's done its best to be stoical about this exile, but there are times when stoicism is a failure. This is one of those times. Norah baby, would you mind very much if I kiss the back of your little neck?"

Norah did not mind in the least.

"All right, little human creature," said Brown, placing her upon the hearth-rug to play with

Bim's silky brown ears, "you've given me as much comfort as one of us is likely to give another, in a world where everybody starves for something he can't have, and only God knows what the fight for self-denial costs. Shall we have supper now, Norah and Bim? Milk for Norah, bones for Bim, meat for Donald Brown —and a prayer for pluck and patience for us all!"

IV

BROWN'S SISTER SUE

It was a rainy, windy, November night. Brown and Bim were alone together—temporarily. Suddenly, above the howling of the wind sounded sharply the clap of the old knocker on the door. Brown laid down his book—reluctantly, for he was human. A woman's figure, clad from head to foot in furs, sprang from the car at the curb, ran across the sidewalk, and in at the open door.

"Go back to the hotel and come for me at twelve, Simpson," she said to her chauffeur as she passed him, and the next moment she was inside the house and had flung the door heavily shut behind her.

"O Don!" she cried, and assailed the tall figure before her with a furry embrace, which was returned with a right good will.

"Well, well, Sue girl! Have you driven seventy miles to see me?" was Brown's response. Bim, circling madly around the pair, barked his emotion.

"Is this——" began Brown's visitor, glancing rapidly about her as she released herself. "Is this——" she began again, and stopped helplessly. Then, "O Don!" she said once more, and again, "O Don!"—and laughed.

"Yes, I know," said Brown, smiling. "Here, let me take off your furs. It's pretty warm here, I imagine. Bim and I are apt to keep a lot of wood on the fire."

"Bim?"

"At your feet—and your service."

The lady looked at the dog, who stood watching her.

"Your only companion, Don?" she asked.

"My best chum. He's so nearly human he understands at this moment that you don't think him handsome. Never mind! We're used to it, aren't we, Bim? Come over and take this chair, Sue. Are you cold? Would you like something hot? Tea—or coffee?"

She sat in the chair he drew to the fire for her. As he looked at his sister's charming, youthful face, and saw her sitting there in her handsome street dress with its various little indications of wealth and fashion—the gold-meshed purse on its slender chain, the rare jewel in the brooch at the throat, the flashing rings on the white hands —he drew in his breath in an incredulous little whistle.

"Is it really you, Sis?" he said. "You look pretty good to me, do you know, sitting there in my old chair!"

She glanced at the arm of the old rocker, worn smooth by the rubbing of many hands.

"Why do you have such a chair?" she an-

swered impatiently—or so it sounded. "Why in the world, if you must live in a hovel like this, don't you make yourself comfortable? Send home for some easy chairs, and rugs and pictures." Her eye wandered about the room. "And a decent desk—and—and—a well-bred dog!"

He laughed. "A better bred dog, in one sense, than Bim you couldn't find. His manners are finer than those of most men. And as for this being a hovel, you do it injustice. It was built at the beginning of the last century by a titled Englishman, who used it for an office on his estate. Look at the big oak beams. Look at the floor, the doors, the fireplace. It's a distinguished little old house, Sue. Admit it!"

She shook her head. "I'll admit nothing, except that you are the most eccentric fellow who ever lived, to come off here and stay all by yourself, when you've been the idol of a congregation like St. Timothy's—and might still be

their idol, if you would take just a little more assistance and not kill yourself with work. I've no patience with you, Don!"

He did not reply to this. Instead, he asked again gently, "Shall it be tea or coffee, Sue?" He stood in the doorway which led to the kitchen and added, as she hesitated, that he could give her an excellent brand of either.

"Coffee, then," she chose, and sat staring into the fire until her brother returned with his earthenware pot and the other essentials for the brewing of coffee, all set forth on a small tray. When, presently, he offered her a fragrant cup, she drank it eagerly.

"That *is* good," she declared. "I didn't know you could cook. When did you learn?"

"On my vacations in the woods. The guides taught me. LaFitte was a wonderful cook—with certain limitations. I've picked up a few other tricks as well. Would you like something to eat?"

"No, thank you."

She had studied him with attention as he knelt before the fire, noting every detail of his appearance. She now put a question which she had reserved.

"Just how well are you now?"

He looked up. "Don't I look well enough to satisfy you?"

"I can't tell. You are frightfully thin——"

"I never was anything else."

"Do you think this sort of thing is doing as much to make you well as Doctor Brainard's prescription of a voyage and stay in the South Seas?"

"Much more."

"You must be dreadfully lonely."

He was sitting, Turk fashion, on the hearth-rug before her, his long legs crossed beneath him, his hands clasping his knees. With the firelight playing over his face and touching the thrown-back chestnut locks of his heavy hair with high

lights here and there, he looked decidedly boyish. At her suggestion of his probable loneliness he smiled and glanced at Bim.

"Bim," said he, addressing a curled-up mass of rough brown hair from which looked out two watchful brown eyes, and which responded instantly to the name by resolving itself into an approaching dog, "are we ever lonely? Rarely, Sue. As a matter of fact, we have a good many callers, first and last."

"What sort of callers?"

"Neighbours, and friends."

"You are in a horribly poor locality. I noticed as I came through. Do you mean that you encourage these people to come to see you?"

"We use all the drawing powers we have, Bim and I."

"Do you mean to say," said she, bending forward, "that you are conducting a *mission*—here, in this place? When you ought to be just trying to get well? Oh, what would Doctor

Brainard say?" Her tone was full of consternation.

Brown threw back his head and laughed, a big, hearty laugh which did not sound at all like that of an invalid.

"Brainard seems to be your special anxiety," he said. "Send him down to see me. I'll make him some flapjacks. If there's any one who appreciates good cookery it's Brainard."

"Don," said his sister slowly, studying the face before her, "what are you trying to do?"

"Accomplish a little something while I'm marking time."

"You ought to be resting!"

"I am. This is child's play, compared with the parish of St. Timothy's. And it's lots more fun!"

"You're an ascetic!"

"Never. No crusts and water for me—coffee and flapjacks every time."

Once more she bent toward him. "You are an ascetic. To live in this place, and wear—— What are you wearing? Old clothes and a—— What on earth is that scarf pin? A ten-cent piece?"

He put up his hand. "Benson, the little old watchmaker on the corner, gave me that. No, it's not a dime. It pleases him immensely to see me wear it. It's not bad, Sue. Nonsense!"

"It's not good—cheap!"

He sat smiling up at her, while she regarded him in silence for a minute. Then she broke out again:

"Why—*why* do you do it? Haven't you worked hard enough in your great parish, without allowing yourself to spoil this rest you so much need?"

"Sue," said her brother, "the best cure for certain kinds of overwork is merely more work, only of a different sort. I can't be idle and contented. Can you?"

"Idle! I should like to be idle. I'm rushed to death, all the time. It's killing me."

"Dressmakers and hairdressers—and dinners and bridge and the whole routine of your set," said he. "It is indeed a hard life—I wonder you stand it."

"Don't be ironic!"

"I'm not ironic. I realized, long ago, that it's the hardest life in the world—and pays the least."

She flushed. "I have my charities," she reminded him. "I'm not utterly useless. And my clubs—belonging to them is a duty I owe other women. I try to fulfill it."

"But you're not happy."

"Happy! I've forgotten the meaning of the word. To tell the honest truth, Don, I've been feeling for a long while that I didn't care—how soon it ended."

"Poor little sister!"

A crashing blow upon the door startled Mrs. Breckenridge so that she cried out under her

breath. Brown went to the door. A furious gust of wind hurled it wide open beneath his hand, but there was no one upon the doorstep. No one? At his feet lay a bundle, from which sounded a wailing cry. He picked it up, looked up and down a vacant street, closed the door, and came back to Sue Breckenridge by the fire.

"I wonder if they chose the bachelor's doorstep by chance or by intention," he said.

V

BROWN'S UNBORROWED BABY

"Don! Don't take it in! They'll come back for it if you don't—they're watching somewhere. Put it back on the doorstone—don't look at it!"

"Why, Sue!" he answered, and for an instant his eyes flashed reproof into hers. "On such a night?"

"But what can you do with it?"

"Make it comfortable, first."

He was unwrapping the bundle. The child was swathed none too heavily in clean cotton comforters; it was crying frantically, and its hands, as Brown's encountered them in the unwinding, were cold and blue. There emerged

from the wrappings an infant of possibly six weeks' existence in a world which had used it ill.

"Will you take him while I get some milk?" asked Brown, as naturally as if handing crying babies over to his sister were an everyday affair with them both.

She shook her head, backing away. "Oh, mercy, no! I shouldn't know what to do with it."

"Sue!" Her brother's tone was suddenly stern. "Don't be that sort of woman—don't let me think it of you!"

He continued to hold out the small wailing bundle. She bit her lip, reluctantly extended unaccustomed arms, and received the foundling into them.

"Sit down close by the fire, my dear, and get those frozen little hands warm. A bit of mothering won't hurt either of you." And Brown strode away into the kitchen with a frown between his brows. He was soon back with a small

cupful of warm milk and water, a teaspoon, and a towel.

"Do you expect to feed a tiny baby with a teaspoon?" Sue asked with scorn.

"You don't know much about babies, do you, Sue? Well, I may have some trouble, but it's too late to get any other equipment from my neighbours, and I'll try my luck."

She watched with amazement the proceedings which followed. Brown sat down with the baby cradled on his left arm, tucked the half-unfolded towel beneath its chin, and with the cup conveniently at hand upon the table began to convey the milk, drop by drop, to the little mouth.

"I don't see how you dare do it. You might choke the child to death."

"Not a bit. He'll swallow a lot of atmosphere and it may give him a pain, but that's better than starving. Isn't it, Baby?"

"You act as if you had half a dozen of your

own. What in the world do you know about babies?"

"Enough to puff me up with pride. Mrs. Murdison, my right-hand neighbour, is the mother of five; Mrs. Kelcey, on my left, has six —and two of them are twins. One twin was desperately ill a while ago. I became well acquainted with it—and with the other five."

"Don!" Again his sister gazed at him as if she found him past comprehension. "You—*you!* What would your friends—our friends—say, if they knew?"

Putting down the teaspoon and withdrawing the towel, Brown snuggled the baby in his left arm. Warmth and food had begun their work in soothing the little creature, and it was quiet, its eyelids drooping heavily.

He got up, carried the baby to the couch, with one hand arranged a steamer rug lying there so that it made a warm nest, and laid the small bundle in it.

Then he returned to his chair by the fire. He lifted his eyes for a long, keen look into his sister's face, until she stirred restlessly under the inspection.

"Well, what do you see?" she asked.

"I see," said Brown slowly, "a woman who is trying to live without remembering her immortality."

She shivered suddenly, there before the blazing fire. "I'm not sure that I believe in it," she said fiercely. "Now I've shocked you, Don, but I can't help it. I'm not sure of anything, these days. That's why——"

"Why you want to forget. But you can't forget. And the reason why you can't forget is because you do believe in it. Every day people are trying to forget one of the greatest facts in the universe. They may deny it with their lips, but with their hearts they know it is true."

She did not answer. Her brother drew his chair closer, leaned forward, and took one of the

jewelled hands in his. He spoke very gently, and in his voice was a certain quality of persuasion which belongs not to all voices which would persuade.

"Sue, make room in your life for a little child. You need him."

Her glance evaded his, flashed past his to the small, still bundle on the couch. Then, suddenly, into her unhappy eyes leaped a suspicion. She straightened in her chair.

"You don't mean—you're not suggesting——"

He smiled, comprehending. "No, no—nothing like that. Your heart isn't big enough for that—yet. It's the mothers of children who make room for the waifs, or those who have long been mothers in heart and have been denied. You don't belong to either of those classes, do you?"

She drew a stifled breath. "You don't know what you are talking about, Don. How could you, a bachelor like you?"

"Couldn't I? Well, Sue, if fathers may be divided into the same two classes, I might be found in one of them."

She stared at him. "You? Oh, I can't believe it. You could have married long ago, if you had wanted to. You could have married anybody—simply anybody!"

"You do me too much honour—or discredit, I'm not just sure which."

"But it's true. With your position—and your money! Rich and brilliant clergymen aren't so common, Donald Brown. And your personality, your magnetism! Men care for you. Women have always hung on your words!"

He made a gesture of distaste; got up.

"Sterility of soul is a worse thing than sterility of body," said he. "But sometimes—God cures the one when He cures the other."

"But you never prescribed this strange thing before."

He smiled. "I've been learning some things

out here, Sue, that I never learned before. One of them is how near God is to a little child."

"You've learned that—of your neighbours?" Her accent was indescribable.

"Of my neighbours—and friends."

It was time for her to go. He helped her into her great fur coat and himself fastened it in place. When she was ready she turned from the window from which she had tried in vain to see her surroundings, and threw at her brother a question which seemed to take him unawares.

"Don, do you know anything about Helena these days?"

Though his face did not change, something about him suggested the mental bracing of himself for a shock. He shook his head.

"She's dropped everything she used to care for. Nobody knows why. Her mother's in despair about her—you know what a society leader Mrs. Forrest has always been. She can't understand Helena—nor can anybody."

"She's not ill?"

"Apparently not; she's as wonderful to look at as ever, when one meets her—which one seldom does. The girls say she walks miles every day, so she must be well in body, though even that doesn't assure Mrs. Forrest. I thought, possibly, you might know. You and Helena used to be such friends."

"We are still, I hope."

His sister's eyes were not easily to be deceived, and they were positive they saw pain in the eyes which met her own.

"Don," she said softly, "may I ask you one question?"

"Please don't."

"When you were a little boy, and you got hurt in any way, you used to run away and hide. Are you—hiding now?"

His eyes grew dark with sudden anger, but he replied with self-control:

"You will have to think what you like about

that, Sue. If that is the way the thing looks to you—so be it!"

The sound of the returning car made Mrs. Breckenridge speak hurriedly:

"I didn't mean to be unkind, Don boy. Nobody knows better than I that you are no coward. Only—only—you know an ascetic denies himself things that he needn't. And—you *are* an ascetic!"

"Can I never convince you of your mistake about that?" he answered; and now his lips smiled again, a little stiffly.

She embraced him once more, stopped to say beseechingly, "You won't keep that baby here, will you, Don?" and, receiving his assurance that he would consult with his neighbours in the morning as to the welfare of the foundling, took her departure.

Left alone Brown went back into the quiet room. The baby was stirring among its wrappings. Bim, who had roused himself to see the

visitor off, came and poked his nose into the bundle.

"We never know what's coming, Bim, do we?" asked Brown of his companion. "Sometimes it's what we want, and sometimes not. But—if we are to teach others we must be taught ourselves, Bim. And that's what's happening now."

VI

BROWN'S PERSISTENT MEMORY

"I wonder," he said to himself an hour later, "if it's any use to go to bed at all!"

He was walking the floor with the baby in his arms. Bim, puzzled and anxious, walked by his side, looking up at the small bundle with a glance which seemed to say, "What in the world are we going to do with it?"

Whether the feeding from the teaspoon had disagreed with its digestion could not be discovered, but clearly the baby was unhappy. It was quiet when walked with but upon being put down immediately set up such an outcry that the bachelor, unaccustomed, could not listen to it with stoicism. Therefore, when he had en-

dured the sound as long as he could, he had taken the little visitor up and was now walking with it, himself in bathgown and slippers.

"It may be a pin, Bim," said he suddenly.

He sat down before the fire, laid the baby upon its face on his knees and began cautiously to investigate. He loosened the tiny garments one by one, until he had reached the little body and could assure himself that no sharp point was responsible for the baby's discomfort. He gently rubbed the small back, wondering, as he did so, at the insignificant area his hand nearly covered. Under this treatment the wailing gradually quieted.

"Bim," said he resignedly, "we shall have to sit up with him—for a while, at least."

Bim walked over to the window.

"No," said his master, "we can't disturb our neighbours at this time of night. We must see it through. If we can manage to read, it will make the time go faster."

He reached for a book, opened it at a mark, and began to read, his hand, meanwhile, steadily maintaining the soothing motion up and down the baby's back. But his thoughts were not upon the page. Instead, they took hold upon one phrase his sister had used—one phrase, which had brought up to him a certain face as vividly as the sudden presentation of a portrait might have done.

"*She's as wonderful to look at as ever.*"

Was she? Well, she had been wonderful to look at—there could be no question of that. He had looked at her, and looked, and looked again, until his eyes had blurred with the dazzle of the vision. And having looked, there could be no possible forgetting, no merciful blotting out of the recollection of that face. He had tried to forget it, to forget the whole absorbing personality, had tried with all his strength, but the thing could not be done. It seemed to him sometimes that the very effort to efface that

image only cut its outlines deeper into his memory.

The baby began to cry afresh, with sudden, sharp insistence. Brown took it up and strode the floor with it again.

"Poor little chap!" he murmured. "You can't have what you want, and I can't have what I want. But it doesn't do a bit of good to cry about it—eh?"

The knocker sounded. Bim growled.

"At this hour!" thought Brown, with a glance at his watch lying on the table. It was nearly two in the morning.

Holding the baby in the crook of his arm he crossed the floor and opened the door gingerly, sheltering the baby behind it.

"Is it the toothache, Misther Brown?" inquired an eagerly pitiful voice. "Or warse?"

Mrs. Kelcey came in, her shawl covering her unbound hair—his next-door neighbour and little Norah's mother. Her face was full of astonish-

ment at sight of Brown in his bathgown and the baby in his arms.

"I'm mighty glad to see you," Brown assured her. "I don't know what to do with him, poor little fellow. I think it must be a pain."

"The saints and ahl!" said Mrs. Kelcey. She took the baby from him with wonted, motherly arms. "The teeny thing!" she exclaimed. "Where——"

"Left on my doorstep."

"An' ye thried to get through the night with him! Why didn't ye bring him to me at wanst?"

"It was late—your lights were out. How did you know I was up?"

"Yer lights wasn't out. I was up with me man—Pat's a sore fut, an' I was bathin' it to quiet him. I seen yer lights. Ye sit up till ahl hours, I know, but I cud see the shadow movin' up and down. I says to Pat, 'He's the toothache, maybe, and me with plinty of rimidies nixt door.'"

She turned her attention to the tiny creature in her lap. She inquired into the case closely, and learned how the child had been fed with a teaspoon.

"To think of a single man so handy!" she exclaimed admiringly. "But maybe he shwallied a bit too much air with the feedin'."

"He swallowed all the air there was at hand," admitted Brown, "and precious little milk. But he seemed hungry, and I thought he was too little to go all night without being fed."

"Right ye were, an' 'tis feedin' he nades agin —only not with a shpoon. I'll take him home an' fix up a bit of a bottle for him, the poor thing. An' I'll take him at wanst, an' let ye get to bed, where ye belong, by the looks of ye."

"You're an angel, Mrs. Kelcey. I hate to let you take him, with all you have on your hands——"

"Shure, 'tis the hands that's full that can always hold a bit more. An' a single man can't be

bothered with cast-off childher, no matter how big his heart is, as we well know."

And Mrs. Kelcey departed, with the baby under her shawl and a motherly look for the man who opened the door for her and stood smiling at her in the lamplight as she went away.

But when he had thrown himself, at last, on his bed, wearily longing for rest, he found he had still to wrestle a while with the persistent image of the face which was "wonderful to look at," before kindly slumber would efface it with the gray mists of oblivion.

VII

BROWN'S FINANCIAL RESOURCES

"There, Tom, how's that? Does it droop as much as the one on the other side?"

Tom Kelcey, aged fourteen, squinted critically at the long festoon of ground-pine between the centre of the chimney-breast and the angle of the dingy old oak-beamed ceiling.

"Drop her a couple of inches, Misther Brown," he suggested. "No, not so much. There, that's the shtuff. Now you've got her, foine and dandy."

Brown stepped down from the chair on which he had been standing, and stood off with Tom to view the effect.

"Yes, that's exactly right," said he, "thanks

to your good eye. The room looks pretty well, eh? Quite like having a dinner party."

"It's ilegant, Misther Brown, that's what it is," said a voice in the doorway behind them. "Tom bhoy, be afther takin' the chair back to the kitchen for him."

Mrs. Kelcey, mother of Tom, and next-door neighbour to Brown, advanced into the room. She was laden with a big basket, which Brown, perceiving, immediately took from her.

"Set it down careful, man," said she. "The crust on thim pies is that delicate it won't bear joltin'. I had the saints' own luck with 'em this toime, praise be."

"That's great," said Brown. "But I haven't worried about that. You never have anything else, I'm sure."

Mrs. Kelcey shook her head in delighted protest.

"The table is jist the handsomest I iver laid

eyes on," she asserted, modestly changing the subject.

"It is pretty nice, isn't it?" agreed Brown warmly, surveying the table with mixed emotions. When he stopped to think of what Mrs. Hugh Breckenridge would say at sight of that table, set for the Thanksgiving dinner her brother, Donald Brown, was giving that afternoon, he experienced a peculiar sensation in the region of his throat. He was possessed of a vivid sense of humour which at times embarrassed him sorely. If it had not been that his bigness of heart kept his love of fun in order he would have had great difficulty, now and then, in comporting himself with necessary gravity.

Mrs. Kelcey herself had arranged that table, spending almost the entire preceding day in dashing about the neighbourhood, borrowing from Brown's neighbours the requisite articles. Brown's own stock of blue-and-white ware proving entirely inadequate, besides being in Mrs.

Kelcey's eyes by no means fine enough for the occasion, she had unhesitatingly requisitioned every piece of china she could lay hands on in the neighbourhood. She had had no difficulty whatever in borrowing more than enough, for every woman in the block who knew Brown was eager to lend her best. The result was such an array of brilliantly flowered plates and cups and dishes of every style and shape, that one's gaze, once riveted thereon, could with difficulty be removed.

When Brown had first conceived this festival it had been with the idea of sending to the nearest city for a full equipment, if an inexpensive one, of all the china and glass, linen and silver necessary for the serving of the meal. But upon thinking it over it occurred to him that such an outlay would not only arouse his new friends' suspicion of his financial resources, it would deprive them of one of the chief joys in such a neighbourhood as this in which he was abiding—

that of the personal sharing in the details of the dinner's preparation and the proud lending of their best in friendly rivalry.

Therefore the table, as it now stood before him in all but complete readiness for the feast, bore such witness to the warmth of esteem in which the neighbourhood held him, not to mention its resourcefulness in fitting together adjuncts not originally intended for partnership, as must have touched the heart of a dinner-giver less comprehending than Donald Brown, late of St. Timothy's great and prosperous parish

To begin with, the table itself had been set up in its place in the front room by Tim Lukens the carpenter, who when he was sober was one of the cleverest of artisans. Starting with two pairs of sawhorses and continuing with smooth pine boards, he had constructed a table of goodly proportions and of a solidity calculated to withstand successfully the demand likely to be made upon it. Over this table-top Mrs. Kelcey had

laid—without thought, it must be admitted, of any intermediary padding such as certain mistaken hostesses consider essential—three freshly and painstakingly laundered tablecloths, her own, Mrs. Murdison's, and Mrs. Lukens's best, cunningly united by stitches hardly discoverable except by a too-searching eye.

The foundations thus laid, the setting of the table had been a delightful task for Mrs. Kelcey, assisted as she was by Mrs. Murdison, who frequently differed from her in points of arrangement but who yielded most of them upon hearing, as she frequently did, Mrs. Kelcey's verbal badge of office: "Misther Brown put me in charrge, Missus Murdison. He says to me, he says, 'Missus Kelcey, do jist as ye think best.'" Together the two had achieved a triumph, and the table now stood forth glowingly ready for its sixteen guests, from the splendid bunch of scarlet geraniums in an immense pink and blue bowl with an Indian's head on one side, to the sixteen

chairs, no two exactly alike, which had been obtained from half as many houses.

As for the dinner itself, there was no patchwork about that. Brown himself had supplied the essentials, trusting that the most of his guests could have no notion whatever of the excessively high cost of turkeys that season, or of the price of the especial quality of butter and eggs which he handed over to Mrs. Kelcey to be used in the preparation of the dishes which he and she had decided upon. That lady, however, had had some compunctions as she saw the unstinted array of materials an astonished grocer's boy had delivered upon her kitchen table two days before the dinner, and had expressed herself to Mrs. Murdison as concerned lest Mr. Brown had spent more than he could well afford.

"'Tis the big hearrt of him that leads his judgment asthray," she said, exulting none the less, as she spoke, over the prospect of handling

all those rich materials and for once having the chance to display her skilled cookery. "I said as much as I dared, lest I hurrt his pride, but—'Tis but wanct a year, Missus Kelcey,' says he, an' I said no more."

The thrifty Scotswoman shook her head. "The mon kens nae mair aboot the cost o' things than a cheild," said she. "But 'twould be, as ye say, a peety to mak' him feel we dinna appreciate his thocht o' us."

So they had done their best for him, and the result was a wonderful thing. To his supplies they had surreptitiously added small delicacies of their own. Mrs. Kelcey contributed a dish of fat pickles, luscious to the eye and cooling to the palate. Mrs. Murdison brought a jar of marmalade of her own making—a rare delicacy, though the oranges were purchased of an Italian vender who had sold out an over-ripe stock at a pittance. Mrs. Lukens supplied a plate of fat doughnuts, and Mrs. Burke sent

over a big platter of molasses candy. Thus the people of the neighbourhood had come to feel the affair one to which not only had they been bidden, but in which they were all in a way entertainers.

The boys of the district, also, had their share in the fun. Though not invited to the dinner proper, they had been given a hint that if they dropped in that evening after their fathers and mothers had departed there might be something left—and what boys would not rather "drop in" after that fashion, by the back door, than go decorously in at the front one? So they had been eager to furnish decorations for the party, according to Brown's suggestion, by going in a body to the woods three miles away and bringing back a lavish supply of ground-pine. They had spent two happy evenings helping Brown make this material into ropes, while he told them stories, and there was not a boy of them all who would not cheerfully have lent his shoulders to

the support of the dinner-table throughout the coming meal, if it had suddenly been reported that Tim Lukens's sawhorses were untrustworthy.

"Now, Misther Brown, I'll be goin' home to see to the twins and get me man to dhress himsilf, an' thin I'll be back. Have no fear—av'rythin's doin' foine, an' the turrkey's an ilegant brown jist beginnin' to show. If I'm not back in tin minutes ye moight baste him wanct, but have no other care."

"I'll be delighted to baste him, thank you," Brown responded. "And I have no cares at all, with you in charge. I only hope you won't be too tired to enjoy the dinner. You've been busy every minute since dawn."

"Shure, 'tis the labour of love makes the worrk aisy," she responded, and then, attacked by a sudden and most unusual wave of shyness, disappeared out of the door.

Brown, standing with his back to the fire,

smiled to himself. Well he knew that since the suffering three-year-old twin son of the Kelceys had spent the night in his pitiful arms and in the morning taken a turn for the better, the entire Kelcey family would have made martyrs of themselves for his sake. It was quite true that that sort of thing, as his sister, Mrs. Breckenridge, had intimated, was not precisely in accordance with the prescription of Dr. Bruce Brainard, distinguished specialist. But if that night had been his last, Donald Brown could not have spent it in a way more calculated to give him pleasure as he closed his eyes. Surely, since life was still his, the love of the Kelceys was not to be despised.

As he dressed for the dinner Brown considered his attire carefully. He could not venture to wear anything calculated to outshine the apparel of his guests, and yet to don the elbow-worn, shiny-backed blue serge of his everyday apparel seemed not to do them quite honour

enough. He had not many clothes with him, but he had brought one suit of rough homespun, smart indeed from the viewpoint of the expensive tailor who had made it, but deceivingly unconventional to the eye of the uninitiated. This he put on, taking particular pains to select a very plain cravat, and to fasten in it with care the scarf-pin bestowed upon him by old Benson, the little watchmaker on the corner below. Through the buttonhole in the lapel of his coat he drew a spicy-smelling sprig of ground-pine, chanting whimsically as he did so a couplet from Ben Jonson:

> "Still to be neat, still to be drest,
> As you were going to a feast."

VIII

BROWN'S BIDDEN GUESTS

And now, promptly on the stroke of two, the dinner guests arrived, not a man or woman of them later than five minutes after. Even Mrs. Kelcey, though she had rushed into the kitchen two minutes earlier by the back door, now entered formally with Patrick, her husband, by the front, and only the high flush on her cheek and the sparkle in her blue-black eye told of a sense of her responsibilities.

The company had put on its best for the occasion, there could be no possible question of that. From the pink geranium in Mrs. Kelcey's hair just behind her ear, to the high polish of her husband's boots, the Kelceys were brave and

fine. Mrs. Murdison, though soberly gowned in slate-coloured worsted, wore a white muslin kerchief which gave her the air of a plump and comfortable Mother Superior. Mr. Murdison, the only gentleman present who possessed a "suit of blacks," as he himself was accustomed to call it, came in looking like the Scottish preacher whose grandson he was, and lent much dignity to the occasion merely by his presence.

There was a predominance of exquisitely ironed white "shirtwaists" among the costumes of the women, but as these were helped out by much elaborate and dressy neckwear of lace and ribbon the general effect was unquestionably festive. The men were variously attired as to clothing, but every collar was immaculate—most of them had a dazzlingly brilliant finish—and the neckties worn were so varied as to give the eye relief from possible monotony.

In spite of Brown's genial greetings to his guests—he had a special welcoming word for

every one—just at first there was a bit of stiffness. The men showed the customary tendency to support one another through the social ordeal by standing in a solid group in a corner of the room, hands behind their backs and an air of great gravity upon their faces, while they spoke, if at all, in low and solemn tones. The women, on the other hand, as ever, did their best to show themselves entirely at ease by addressing, one after another, remarks to their host calculated to prevent his having any doubt as to the sort of weather now prevailing outside or likely to prevail during the days to come.

Brown, having anticipated this period of gloom before the feast should actually begin, had arranged with Mrs. Kelcey that as soon as the last guest had arrived the company should sit down at the table. Mrs. Kelcey, true to her word, gave him the nod without the delay of more than a minute or two, and promptly the company seated itself. Brown, drawing back

her chair for Mrs. Murdison, who as his most impressive guest he had placed upon his right, noticed, without seeming to notice, that the little watchmaker did the same for his wife, and with an effect of habit. Speaking of wives, the company being left to seat themselves according to their own notion (Brown having considered the question of dinner cards and discarded it), every man sat down beside his own wife, in some instances being surreptitiously jerked into position by a careful conjugal hand.

Brown, looking about his table with a smile, bent his head. Every eye fell and every ear listened to the words which followed:

"*Our Father, we are here in company with Thee and in warm friendliness with one another. We are thankful on this day that we are busy men and women, able to do our work and to be useful in Thy world. Teach us to find in life the joy of living it to please Thee. Amen.*"

It was Mrs. Kelcey who broke the hush which

followed, by starting from her place to run out into the kitchen and bring on the dinner. From this moment the peculiar fitness of Donald Brown for the duties of host showed itself. That his dinner should be stiff and solemn was not in his intention, if the informality of his own conduct could prevent it. He therefore jumped up from his own place to follow Mrs. Kelcey to the kitchen and bring in the great platter for her, bearing the turkey in a garland of celery leaves, a miracle of luscious-looking brownness.

He had considered the feasibility of serving at least one preliminary course, not so much because it seemed to him impossible to plunge at once into the heartiness of fowl and stuffing as because he wanted to prolong the hour of dining for his guests. But Mrs. Kelcey had promptly vetoed this notion.

"Man, dear," she had said earnestly, "an' why would ye be shpoiling the appetoites of yer company with soup? 'Tis soup they know only

too well—but the turrkey! 'Tis manny a long year since Mrs. Murdison and Andy have tasted the loike of it, an' the same with the ithers. If 'twas chickun, I'll warrant now—we're all glad to make a bit of chickun go furrther with other things—but a grreat turrkey like this wan—— Give it to thim sthrait, Misther Brown, an' that's my advoice. Ye can take it or lave it."

Brown had accepted this wise counsel, of course, and now saw the full wisdom of it as he beheld the looks of veiled but hungry—one might almost have said starving—anticipation which fell upon the big turkey as it was borne to its place at the end of the table.

"I don't know how an old bachelor is going to make out to carve before such a company," Brown said gaily, brandishing his carving knife. (This was a bit of play-making, for he was a famous carver, having been something of an epicure in days but one year past, and accustomed to demand and receive careful service in

his bachelor establishment.) "I wonder if I can manage it. Mr. Benson"—he addressed the old watchmaker—"what do you say to taking my place and helping me out? I'd hate to ruin the bird."

"I say I'll not do it, Mr. Brown," responded old Benson. "Watch-making is my business, and it's watch I'll make now of your carving."

This brave attempt at a witticism brought a fine response, Brown's hearty laugh leading off. And now the ice began to be broken into smaller and smaller bits. Brown's gay spirits, his mirth-provoking observations as he carved the tender fowl, the way in which he appreciated the efforts of his guests to do their part, led them all to forget themselves in greater or less degree. When it came to the actual attacking of the piled-up plates before them, it is true that there ensued considerable significant silence, but it was the silence of approval and enjoyment, not that of failure to be entertained.

If it occurred to Brown to wish himself at some more exalted festival-making with more congenial associates on this Thanksgiving Day, no one would have dreamed it. To all appearances he was with his best friends, and if he did not partake of the toothsome meal before him with such avidity as they, it would have needed a more discerning person to have recognized it than any one who sat at his board—at his boards, it might be put, remembering Tim Lukens's achievement with the sawhorses.

Tim, himself, was present, sober and subdued but happy. How it came about that he had not drunk a drop for several weeks, none but Brown and Mrs. Lukens could have told. Tim's glance was often upon Brown's face—the look in his eyes, now and then, reminded Brown of that in the eyes of his dog Bim when he had earned his master's approval, shy but adoring.

In spite of all there was to eat in that mighty first course of turkey and stuffing and mashed

white potatoes and sirup-browned sweet potatoes, and every possible accompaniment of gravy and vegetable and relish, not to mention such coffee as none of them had ever drunk, it all disappeared with astonishing rapidity down the throats of the guests. How, indeed, can one mince and play with his food when he and his wife have not in their lives tasted so many good things all at once, and when both have been prepared for the feast by many weeks and months—and years—of living upon boiled potatoes with a bit of salt pork, or even upon bread and molasses, when times were hard? Brown's neighbours were not of the very poorest, by any means, but all were thriftily accustomed to self-denial, and there is no flavour to any dainty like that of having seldom tasted but of having longed for it all one's life.

When the second course had come and gone—it was composed entirely of pies, but of such pies!—Brown surprised Mrs. Kelcey by going to

a cupboard and bringing out a final treat unsuspected by her. A great basket of fruit, oranges and bananas and grapes, flanked by a big bowl of nuts cunningly set with clusters of raisins, made them all exclaim. Happily, they had reached the exclaiming stage, no longer afraid of their host or of one another.

"It's reckless with his money he is, Patsy," whispered Mrs. Kelcey to her husband. "It'll take a power of it to pay for all o' thim, an' fruit so dear."

"Whist, he knows what he's about," returned Patrick Kelcey, uninclined to remonstrate with any man for giving him that unaccustomed and delightful feeling that his vest buttons must be surreptitiously unloosed or he would burst them off. He helped himself lavishly as he spoke.

By and by, when all had regretfully declined so much as another raisin—"Now we must have some music!" cried Brown. "Tim, did you bring your fiddle?"

Tim Lukens nodded. Carpentry was Tim's vocation, but fiddling was his avocation and dear delight. He was presently fiddling away, while the company sat about, completely relaxed in spirit, and Mrs. Kelcey and Mrs. Murdison hustled the table clear of dishes, refusing sternly Brown's eager offer to help them. And now came the best time of all. Tim played all the old tunes, and when he struck into "Kate Kearney" the company was electrified to hear a rich and vibrant voice take up the words of the song and sing them through to the end.

Sitting carelessly on his pine-bottomed chair —it was one from the Kelcey house—one hand in his pocket, his heavy hair tossed back and his lips smiling, Brown's splendid tones rang through the room and held his listeners enthralled. Never had they heard singing like that. They could have no possible notion of the quality of the voice to which they listened, but they enjoyed its music so thoroughly that the

moment the song was ended they were eager for another. So he sang them another and still another, while the warm blood rolled in under his dark skin, enriching his thin cheek till it looked no longer thin. He was giving himself up to the task of pleasing his friends, with thorough enjoyment of his own. After "Kate Kearney" he sang "Annie Laurie," making Andy Murdison's warm Scottish heart under his stiff Scottish manner beat throbbingly in sympathy. So the hours passed, it never occurring to the company to go home as long as it was having the time of its life, until the sudden discovery of a row of boys' faces peering eagerly in from the darkness of the late afternoon reminded Mrs. Kelcey that she had a family at home.

"The saints be prraised, 'tis afther darrk," said she, rising precipitately, "and the bhoys promised the lavin's of the table!"

They all followed her, suddenly grown shy again as they murmured their thanks. Their

host's cheery parting words eased them over this ordeal, however, and each one left with the comfortable feeling that he had said the right thing.

Two minutes later the house was again invaded, this time by those who felt entirely at home there. With a whoop of joy the boys of the neighbourhood took possession, and as they did so a curious thing happened: Donald Brown himself became a boy among them.

But this was not the only curious thing which happened.

The sixteen guests at the dinner, in spite of the generous supplies, had not left many "lavin's." The great turkey had little remaining now upon his bones and nothing at all inside of him; the potatoes and vegetables had been entirely consumed; of the pies there remained a solitary wedge. But Brown, smiling broadly, attended to these difficulties. He had the air of a commissary who knew of unlimited supplies.

"Tom," he commanded, "pick three boys and

go down cellar with them, and into the little storeroom at the right."

Tom, grinning, made a lightning-like selection of assistants, and dove down the steep and narrow stairway from the kitchen.

"Burke and Jimpsey, explore the cupboard opening from my bedroom, and bring out whatever you find there that looks good to eat."

Before the words were out of his mouth Burke and Jimpsey had disappeared.

"Tub and Jiggers, look under my bed, and haul out a long box you'll find there."

The two fell over each other to do his bidding. In less time than it takes to tell it, the emissaries were returning with their spoils. A whole cooked turkey, only slightly inferior in size to the original one, appeared to the accompaniment of howls of joy. It was cold, to be sure, but what boy would mind that—and to the critical palate is not cold turkey even more delicious than hot? There were piles and piles of sandwiches with the

most delectable filling, there were pies and more pies, and there were fruit and cake and candy. Brown had not feared lest these later guests suspect him of too long a purse; he had ordered without stint, and his orders had been filled by a distant firm of caterers and sent by express.

Now there were girls in the neighbourhood as well as boys. By a mysterious invitation they had been summoned to the home of one of their number, a small cripple, and were there at the very moment rejoicing in all manner of festivities. Nobody knew how it had happened, nor where the good things came from, except the little girl who was their hostess, and wild horses could not have dragged the wonderful secret from her. Brown himself, making merry with his boys, remembered the girls with a comfortable feeling at his heart that for once, at least, a goodly number of people, young and old, were happier than they had ever been before in their lives on Thanksgiving Day.

As for his own immediate entertaining the revel now began—no lesser word describes it. If, before the departure of his dinner guests, Brown had experienced a slight feeling of fatigue, it disappeared with the pleasure of seeing his present company disport themselves. They were not in the least afraid of him—how should they be, when he had spent months in the winning of their confidence and affection by every clever wile known to the genuine boy lover? That they respected him was plainly shown by the fact that, ill trained at home as most of them had been, with him they never overstepped certain bounds. At the lifting of a finger he could command their attention, though the moment before their boisterousness had known no limits.

If the earlier guests had been surprisingly rapid in their consumption of the dinner, these later ones were startlingly so. Like grain before a flock of hungry birds, like ice beneath a bonfire, the viands, lavishly provided though

they had been, melted away in almost the twinkling of an eye. And it was precisely as the last enormous mouthful of cherry pie vanished down Jiggers Quigg's happy throat that the unexpected happened.

IX

BROWN'S UNBIDDEN GUESTS

The front door, opening directly into the living-room, with its long table, and its flashing fire lighting the eager faces round it—nobody had thought of or bothered to make any other light in that room—was flung open by a fur-gloved hand, and a large figure appeared in the doorway. A ruddy face looked in upon the scene. This face possessed a pair of keen gray eyes, a distinguished nose, and a determined mouth beneath a close-trimmed moustache with flecks of gray in it.

Brown sprang up. "Doctor Brainard!" he cried joyfully, and came forward with out-stretched hand.

The unexpected guest advanced. Behind him appeared others. To the dazed and gazing boys these people might have come from Greenland, so enveloped were they in defences against the cold. Motor coats of rich fur, furry hats and caps, floating silken veils, muffs, rugs—wherever they came from they could not have minded coming, sharp as was the November air outside, as the boys, who had been hanging about the the house since the first approach of twilight, well knew.

Dr. Bruce Brainard was followed by two men and three women. In the flickering firelight Brown was obliged to come close to each, as in smiling silence they approached him, before he could make sure whom the furs and scarfs enshrouded.

"Sue!" he exclaimed, discovering his sister. "And Hugh Breckenridge! This is great, brother-in-law! Mrs. Brainard—can it be Mrs. Brainard? How kind of you! You must

have known how I've been wanting to see you. Webb Atchison, is that you, looming behind there? How are you, old fellow? But—this lady in the veil——"

He bent closer as he took the gloved hand outstretched, but all he could make out in the traitorous light was a pair of dark eyes, and lips that must be laughing behind the heavy silken veil.

"Do I know her?" he asked, looking round upon the others, who were watching him.

"You have met her," Hugh Breckenridge assured him.

"Several times," added Webb Atchison.

"But not of late," said Brown, "or else I——"

"Once to have seen her," declared Doctor Brainard, "means never to forget."

"You put me in a hard place," Brown objected, trying in vain to distinguish outlines through the veil. "She isn't going to lift it? Must I guess?"

"Of course you must guess, Don," cried his sister.

"How can he?" laughed Breckenridge. "He knows so many fair beings of about that height, and furs and veils are disguising things. Without them, of course, though she wore a mask, he would have no difficulty."

"Will you speak one word?" asked Brown of the unknown.

She shook her head.

"Then—forgive me, but I'm puzzled," said he, laying light but determined hold upon the veil. "I can't imagine at all who—would honour me——"

He gently lifted the veil. The others saw his expression change as the drawn folds revealed a face whose dark-eyed beauty was vividly enhanced by the fire-glow upon cheeks which the November frost had stung into a wonder colour. There was a general laugh of appreciation.

"Never would have thought it, eh?" chuckled

Webb Atchison, a fine and prosperous figure of a bachelor past his first youth but not yet arrived at middle age, and with the look of one who does what he pleases with other people. "Well, it wasn't her plan, I assure you. She was horror-stricken when she learned where we were bound."

"Donald Brown in his bachelor apartment in the Worthington was one person, this queer fellow living in a roadside cabin is quite another," suggested Dr. Bruce Brainard quizzically. "Still, I'll warrant Miss Forrest will confess to a bit of curiosity, when she found she was in for it."

"Were you curious?" asked Donald Brown. He was still looking steadily down into the lifted face of the person before him. Into his own face had come a look as of one who has been taken unawares at a vulnerable point, but who has instantly rallied his forces to stand out the attack.

"They were all curious," answered Miss Forrest, and the sound of her voice was different from that of the other voices. If, as Doctor

Brainard had jestingly but truthfully said, one who had seen her would not forget her, a similar statement might with equal truth be made of the hearing of her voice. The one word Brown had asked from her lips could certainly have revealed her to him—and would have done so while he had a memory.

"To see if we know how to keep Thanksgiving here?" Brown inquired of the group, though his eyes came back again to Helena Forrest's face.

"To see if you had anything to be thankful for," cried Sue Breckenridge. "Well, Don, now that we are here, are you going to invite us to stay? Or—is your present company——"

Brown wheeled and went over to the boys, who were staring, open-eyed and motionless.

"You'll help me out, fellows, won't you?" he said in a low tone—and they felt him still one of them, for the tone was the old one of comradeship. "You see, I have nowhere to ask my guests to sit down. If each of you will take

what you can at a time, and carry everything out into the kitchen, and then take out the table, I'll be much obliged. You are coming again soon, you know; but for to-night, you see, I must call it off. Tom, you'll see to taking off the tablecloth, will you? Fold it up any sort of way, but don't let the crumbs get out. All right?"

There was a tumultuous pushing back of chairs. In short order it was all accomplished. The guests stood at one side, looking at the boys as curiously as the boys had looked at them, while the dishes disappeared as fast as many hands could carry them. The big bowl of geraniums was removed by Brown himself, who set it carefully upon his reading-table at the side of the room, and the tablecloth was painstakingly manipulated by Tom Kelcey so that hardly a crumb fell upon the floor. There was one crash of crockery in the kitchen, followed by a smothered howl from the boy who in his

agitation had done the deed, but this was the only accident.

Brown turned again to his guests.

"Now," said he, "will you make yourselves at home? It's a cold night out. Let's have off the furs and sit by the fire. Mrs. Brainard, allow me to help you out of that coat. This is the happiest sort of a surprise for me!"

X

BROWN'S ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Donald Brown stood at the end of his hearth, his elbow resting on the chimney-piece, his eyes, narrowed a little between the lashes, intently regarding these latest guests of his. He was in the shadow, they were in the strong light of the fire. A great lump of cannel coal, recently laid upon the red-hot embers and half-burned logs of the afternoon fire, had just broken apart with a great hissing and crackling of the pitchy richness of its inner formation, and the resultant glow of rosy light which enveloped the figures before the hearth, against the duller background of the room, otherwise unillumined, made them stand out like figures in a cleverly lighted tableau.

They were much more interesting to Brown, however, than anything he had ever seen in the set and artificial radiance of the calcium light. He knew well every face there, and yet, after his year's exile and in contrast to the faces at which he had been lately looking, they formed a more engrossing study than any he had known for many months.

In the centre of the circle, in Brown's old red-cushioned rocker and most comfortable chair, sat Mrs. Brainard, the exquisitely sophisticated wife of the distinguished specialist close by. Her graceful head, with its slight and becoming touches of gray at the temples, rested like a fine cameo against the warm hue of the cushion. Her brilliant eyes reflected the dancing firelight; her shapely hands, jewelled like Mrs. Breckenridge's, but after an even more rare and perfectly chosen fashion, lay in her silken lap. As his glance fell upon these hands some whimsical thought brought to Brown's mind Mrs. Kelcey's

red, work-roughened ones. He wondered if by any chance the two hands would ever meet, and whether Mrs. Brainard's would shrink from the contact, or meet it as that of a sister, "under the skin."

Near her his sister Sue's dainty elegance of person showed like a flower against the big figure of Doctor Brainard, who sat at her elbow. Brainard himself, with his splendid head and erect carriage, was always an imposing personage; he had never seemed more so than now, with the face of Patrick Kelcey, Andrew Murdison, and James Benson, the little watchmaker, in the background of Brown's mind with which to contrast it. Beyond Mrs. Brainard lounged Hugh Breckenridge—as nearly as one could be said to lounge—in a plain, cane-seated chair without arms.

At one side of the group was Webb Atchison, the rich bachelor of the party where all were possessed of wealth in plenty. Next Atchison

sat Miss Helena Forrest, the one member of the company who had not known where she was going until well upon her way there. Upon her the glance of the man standing by the chimney-piece fell least often, yet there was no person present of whom he was so unremittingly conscious. It may be said that from the moment that he had lifted her veil in his puzzled search for her identity, he had been conscious of little else.

There was not a single movement of Miss Forrest's hands—and she had certain little delightful, highly characteristic ways of helping out her speech with slight yet significant motions—but had its place in Brown's memory. She was not a frequent talker, she did not speak one word to Sue Breckenridge's fifty; but when she did speak, in her voice of slow music, people listened. And yet one never thought of her, Brown remembered, as a silent person; the effect of her presence in any circle was that of a personality

of the active, not the passive, sort. The eyes of one speaking must, involuntarily, be drawn to her because she was listening, if I may coin a phrase, vividly. As for her looks—she possessed that indescribable charm which is not wholly a matter of beautiful features, but lies rather in such details as the lift of the eyebrow, the curve of the lip, the droop of the hair upon the brow. She was dressed much more simply than either of the older women present, yet with the simplicity, it must be admitted, of the artist. She seemed somehow to make their goodly showing fade before her own, as a crimson flower draws from the colour of one of delicate blue.

Well, take them separately or as a group, they were an absorbing study to the man who had seen so little of their kind for so long past, yet knew that kind by the wontedness of his lifetime. He seemed to himself somehow to be viewing them all, for the first time, from a vantage point he had never before occupied. Every

word they said in their pleasantly modulated, well-bred voices, with the familiar accent of the educated environment from which they came, and from which he came—it was his accent, too, but somehow it sounded a bit foreign to him tonight—struck upon his ear with a new meaning. Each gesture they made, personal and familiar to him as they were, struck Brown now with its special individuality.

"It's not fair, Don," said Sue Breckenridge suddenly, "for you to stand over there in the shadow and watch us, without our being able to see your face at all."

"You don't realize," declared Brown, in answer to this assertion and the general assenting laugh which followed it, backed by Atchison's "Hear, hear!" "that the group you all make in the light of my fire is a picture far ahead of anything in Atchison's collection. I should be an unappreciative host indeed if I didn't make the most of it."

"What an artful speech!" laughed Mrs. Brainard, lifting fine eyes in an attempt to make out the shadowy face above her. "It's well calculated to distract our attention from the fact that you are not changing your position by so much as the moving of an arm. We came to see you, man, not to show ourselves to you."

"We came to cheer his loneliness," put in Hugh Breckenridge with a peculiar, cynical-sounding little laugh for which he was famous. "And we find him up to his neck in boys. Jove! How do you stand their dirty hands, Don? That's what would get me, no matter how good my intentions were."

"Those hands were every pair scrubbed to a finish, to-day, in honour of Thanksgiving. Do you think we have no manners here?" retorted Brown.

"That wasn't the dinner party you wrote me of when you refused to come to mine, was it, Don?" questioned his sister.

"No. This was an after-dinner party, partaking of the 'lavin's,'" Brown explained. "The real one was over an hour before."

"Do tell us about it. Did you enjoy it? Won't you describe your guests?" Mrs. Brainard spoke eagerly.

"With pleasure. The Kelceys are my next-door neighbours on the left. Mrs. Kelcey is pure gold—in the rough. Her husband is not quite her equal, but he knows it and strives to be worthy of her. The Murdisons, on the other side, are—Scotch granite—splendid building material. Old Mr. Benson, the watchmaker, is —well, he's full-jewelled. The others I perhaps can't characterize quite so easily, but among them I find several uncut gems of the semi-precious varieties. Of course there's considerable commonplace material—if you can ever call the stuff of which human beings are made commonplace, which I doubt. There's more or less copper and brass, with a good bit of clay—as

there is in all of us. And a deal of a more spiritual element which can't be measured or described, but which makes them all worth knowing."

He had spoken in a thoughtful tone, as if he took Mrs. Brainard's question seriously and meant to answer it in the same way. A moment's silence followed. Then Doctor Brainard said slowly:

"I suppose you don't find those priceless elements among the people of your abandoned parish. Down there we're all copper and clay, eh?"

"If you had been clay I might have done more with you," was the quick retort.

"And you can do things with these people, can you? Dig out the rough gold, polish the uncut diamonds, build temples of the granite—and perhaps mold even the clay into works of art?"

The answer to the ironic question was grave enough, and it came with a quietness which

spoke more eloquently than fervid tones would have done of the feeling behind it.

"No, Doctor, I can't hope to do those things. I'm not wise enough. But the things these people are going to do to me, if I'll let them, are worth coming for."

"They've done some of them already," murmured Mrs. Brainard. But nobody heard her except Sue Breckenridge, who cried out:

"And you're not a bit homesick, Don, while you're living like this?"

"If you people won't come up here very often and make me remember what being with you is like, I shall get on pretty well," said Brown's voice from the shadow.

"Then we'll come as often as we can," cried Sue triumphantly.

"No, you won't—not if you want to help me. My reputation as an indigent bachelor out of a job won't stand many onslaughts of company dressed as you are. If you want to come to see

me you must come disguised. I'm afraid I'm under suspicion already."

"Explain to them that we're the clay, they the uncut diamonds. That will let you out," advised Doctor Brainard grimly.

"Ah, but you don't look the part," said Brown, laughing. "You look like what you are, a big jewel of a fellow, as my friend Mrs. Kelcey would say. To tell the truth, you all seem like jewels to me to-night—and such polished ones you dazzle my eyes. Hugh, I'd forgotten what a well-cut coat looked like. I remember now."

"You seem pretty well dressed yourself," remarked Atchison, peering up into the shadow. "According to Mrs. Breckenridge, you go about dressed in monk's cloth, and a shabby variety at that. This doesn't look like it."

"He was wearing a dreadful, old shiny serge suit when I saw him a fortnight ago," said Sue. "And such a scarf-pin! Don, are you wearing

that same scarf-pin to-night? Do show it to them."

"Does choosing to live by himself make a man a fair target for all the quips and arrows of his friends?" Brown queried, at the same time withdrawing obediently the little silver pin from his cravat and giving it into Atchison's outstretched hand. "Be just to that pin, Webb. It was given me by a special friend of mine."

"How will you exchange?" Atchison inquired gravely, touching his own neckwear as he examined the pin. A rare and costly example of the jeweller's art reposed there, as might have been expected.

"I'll not exchange, thank you."

"Neither will I," declared Atchison, leaning back with a laugh and passing the pin on down the line.

Hugh Breckenridge gave the obviously cheap and commonplace little article one careless

glance, and handed it to Miss Forrest. She examined it soberly, as if seeking to find its peculiar value in its owner's eyes Then she looked at Brown.

"This has a story, I am sure, or you wouldn't care so much for it," she said. "Are we worthy to hear it, Mr. Brown?"

His eyes met hers, though as he stood she could barely make out that fact.

"I should like you to hear it."

"Come out of the darkness, Don, please!" begged his sister again.

The others echoed the wish, and Brown, yielding against his will—somehow he had never wanted more to remain in the shadow—took a chair at one end of the hearth, where he was in full view of them all.

"It was given me," said Brown, speaking in a tone which instantly arrested even Hugh Breckenridge's careless attention, though why it did so he could not have said, "by a man whose

son was wearing it when he stood on a plank between two windows, ten stories up in the air, and passed fifteen girls over it to safety. Then —the plank burned through at one end. He had known it would."

There fell a hush upon the little group. Mrs. Brainard put out her hand and touched Brown's shoulder caressingly.

"No wonder you wouldn't exchange it, Don," she said, very gently.

"Was the father at your dinner, Don?" Doctor Brainard asked, after a minute.

"Yes, Doctor."

"So you wore it to please him," commented Sue.

"He wore it," said Helena Forrest, "as a man might wear the Victoria Cross."

"Ah, but I didn't earn it," denied Brown, without looking up.

"I'm not so sure of that," Mrs. Brainard declared. "You must have done something to

make the father feel you worthy to wear a thing he valued so much."

"He fancied," said Brown—"he and the mother—that there was a slight resemblance between my looks and those of the son. And they have a finer memorial of him than anything he wore; they have one end of the burned plank. The father has cut the date on it, with his son's name, and it hangs over the chimney-piece."

"What a tragic thing!" cried Sue, shuddering. "I don't see how they can keep it. Do tell us something else, Don. Doesn't anything amusing ever happen here? Oh— what became of the baby?"

Brown rose suddenly to his feet. "I'm forgetting my hospitality," said he. "I'm going to make you all some coffee. The baby, Sue, is at Mrs. Kelcey's, next door. Having only six of her own, she could easily make room for the seventh."

"Tell us about the baby," demanded Webb

Atchison. "Has Don gone into the nursery business, with all the rest?"

Sue began to tell the story, describing the night on which she made her first visit to her brother. Brown disappeared into the kitchen and soon returned, bringing with him, as was his entertaining custom, the materials for brewing his coffee upon the hob.

"You remember," he said, as he came, "the way this room was cleared for your reception?"

"By an avalanche of boys, who swept everything, hurly-burly, into outer darkness," supplied Breckenridge.

"You can guess, perhaps, what the kitchen must be looking like, can't you?"

"Indescribable," murmured Sue. "You're not going to invite us to put it in order for you, are you, Don?—and wash all those dreadful, gaudy plates and cups?"

"Just take a look out there, will you?"

Sue shook her head, but Mrs. Brainard went

to the door, followed by Atchison and Miss Forrest. They looked out upon a low-ceiled, lamp-lighted room, in absolute order, in which was not a trace of the late festival-making except the piles of clean dishes upon the table, under which lay Bim, nose on paws, alert eyes on the strangers.

"Magic?" queried Mrs. Brainard. "Surely those noisy boys couldn't accomplish such a miracle?"

"Never. Though I suspect they were put to work by a good general, for the borrowed chairs are gone and so are several other bulky articles. There's no difficulty in guessing who did the deed," said Brown, busy with his coffee-making.

He served his guests presently with a beverage which made Atchison exclaim: "The old chap certainly knows how to make the best stuff I ever drank. When I tasted this brew first I invited myself to come out and stay a week with him, but he wouldn't have me."

"You're too polished an article for his hand; he wants his work-stuff raw," Doctor Brainard said again. Evidently this point rankled. Brown looked up.

"I'll challenge you to stay and have it out with me, Doctor," said he.

"Thank you, I came for no other purpose," retorted the doctor coolly. "These people brought me up to have a look at you, and I'm not going back till morning."

"That's great!" Brown's face showed his pleasure.

XI

BROWN'S PRESENT WORLD

When Miss Forrest returned from her survey of the kitchen she had come straight to the corner of the hearth where Brown stood, and had taken the chair beside the one he had lately occupied. He was therefore beside her when he sat down to drink his coffee with his guests. At a moment when Webb Atchison and Sue Breckenridge were engaged in a bit of controversy over the relative merits of varying methods of coffee making, Helena Forrest turned to Brown, who had been looking into the fire without speaking.

"I hope you don't really mind our coming up here to-night," she said.

"Mind it? If I did, I couldn't blame you, for you came against your will," he answered—and his eyes were no longer upon the fire.

"Without my consent, but not, perhaps, against my will."

He regarded her intently. She met his look without turning aside.

"You felt a curiosity to see the hermit in his cell," was his explanation of the matter.

She nodded. "Of course. Who wouldn't, after such reports as Mrs. Breckenridge brought back?"

"And now that you have seen him—you are consumed with pity?"

"No. If I am consumed with anything it is with envy."

His low laugh spoke his disbelief. She read it in the sound and in the way his gaze left her face and went back to the fire.

"You don't think I mean that," said she.

"Hardly."

"Why not?"

"It is—inconceivable."

"Why?"

Her face, turned toward him, invited him to look at it again, but he did not—just then.

"Because you are—Helena Forrest," he answered.

"And what is she, please, in your opinion?"

"An inhabitant of another world than that I live in."

"A world of which you have an even poorer opinion than you used to have when you lived in it yourself!"

He smiled. "Anyhow, I am no longer in it. Nor ever shall go back."

A startled look passed over her face. "You don't mean that you intend to stay here—forever?"

"Not quite that. But I mean to do this sort of work, rather than the sort I began with. To

do it I must live much as I am living now, wherever that may be. Now—what about the envy of me you profess?"

He turned, still smiling, at the little sound he caught from her half-closed lips.

"Are you happy in such a decision?" she murmured.

"Do I look like an unhappy man?"

She shook her head. "That's what I have been noticing about you ever since I came. You did look unhappy when you went away. Now, you don't. And it is the look on your face which gives me the sense of envy."

Brown gave one quick glance at the rest of the party. "Do you mean to say," he questioned, very low, "that you are not happy?"

"Does that seem so strange?"

"It might very naturally seem so, to one who knows what you have to make you the happiest of the happy."

"You yourself didn't find happiness among

similar surroundings," she said, looking at him intently.

"Similar?" The thought seemed to amuse him.

"Well, weren't they similar? At any rate we were in the same world, and you say now we are not."

"We are so far apart," said he evenly, "that we can only signal to each other. And even then—neither is familiar with the other's code!"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and a strange expression showed in her eyes. "What a hard, hard thing for you to say! It doesn't sound like you."

"Hard?" he questioned, with a contraction of the brows. "It is substantially what you yourself once said. If it was true then, it must be true now."

Moved by some impulse the two looked at each other searchingly, Donald Brown's face grave but tense, Helena Forrest's full of a proud

pain. Clearly they were not understanding each other's code now—so much was evident.

At this instant, without warning, the outer door flew open. Mrs. Kelcey, her round red face disordered, her breath coming short, stood upon the threshold and spoke pantingly, without regard to the company assembled:

"Mr. Brown, sor! The baby's dyin—the sthranger child. It was took all of a suddint. Would ye moind comin' to say a bit of a prayer over him? Father McCarty's away, or I wouldn't ask it."

She was gone with the words. With the first sentence Brown had sprung to his feet. As Mary Kelcey vanished he turned to Doctor Brainard.

"Come, Doctor," he said, with a beckoning hand. "While I say the bit of a prayer you try what you can do to keep the baby here!"

The eminent physician rose rather slowly to his feet. "It's probably no use," he demurred. "The woman knows."

"The Lord knows, too," declared Brown, with a propelling hand on his friend's arm: "knows that you're here to give the child a chance. Come! Hurry!"

The two went out. Doctor Brainard would have stayed for his hat and overcoat, but Brown would brook no delay.

Left behind, the party by the fire looked at one another with faces sobered. Hugh Breckenridge consulted his watch.

"It's time we were off," he declared. "The Doctor's going to stay anyway, and it's no use waiting for Don to come back."

"That's right," agreed Webb Atchison. "I came up here once before, about six months ago, and I saw then enough of the way things went here to know that he lives at the beck and call of every man, woman, and child in this district—and they call him, too. He'd just finished sobering up a drunkard that night, or scant attention I'd have had. Well, I'll walk

down to the hotel and send back Rogers and the car. Be ready in ten minutes?"

They said they would be ready. But in Brown's little bedroom, donning furry wraps, Helena Forrest spoke in Sue Breckenridge's ear:

"I can't bear to go till we know how it comes out."

Sue stared at her. "You don't mean to say you care? Why—it's just a forlorn little foundling—better dead than alive. I saw it when I was here two weeks ago. It has nothing to live for, dear. Don't think of it again."

"But he cared—your brother cared," said Helena Forrest.

"Oh, Don cares about everything. I never saw such a soft heart. Of course I think it's lovely of him, though I don't understand how he can be so absorbed in such a class of people."

Miss Forrest went to the one window of the room. She lifted the plain shade which covered it and looked out into the night.

Ten yards away she saw a brightly lighted, uncurtained window, beyond which were figures, plainly discernible. The figures were moving, one bringing a pail, another stooping—the scene was not one of still waiting but of tense action. She caught a glimpse of Doctor Brainard's tall form bending above something at one side, then she saw Brown himself cross the room in haste.

Mrs. Brainard and Sue went back to the outer room to stand before the fire with the purpose of accumulating all the bodily heat possible before the long, cold drive. Miss Forrest, unheeding them, remained by the window in the unlighted bedroom. Minutes passed. Hugh Breckenridge had fallen to examining the larger room's eighteenth century features—he was something of a connoisseur in antiques.

Helena, turning from the window for a moment, scanned the shadowy room in which she stood. It was very scantily furnished with the

bare essentials. Upon the plain chest of drawers which held Brown's bachelor belongings stood a few simply framed photographs; an old set of hanging bookshelves was crammed full of books, with more overflowing upon the floor.

Suddenly, as she stood there, an outer door banged; swift footsteps crossed the floor. Helena turned to see Donald Brown himself rushing into the room. He ran to the chest of drawers, pulled one open, searched a minute, withdrew something, and was hurrying out of the room again, when he caught sight of the figure at the window. Involuntarily he halted for an instant.

"Can you save it?" Helena cried, under her breath.

"I don't know—Brainard's got his coat off. Pray for us, will you?"

He was gone again.

Beside the narrow bed on which he lay every night, there dropped upon its knees a figure in

sumptuous furs; a face such as men vow themselves ready to die for was pressed into the hard little pillow. Helena Forrest breathed a prayer of beseeching for a life she had never seen, and when she had done lifted eyes wet with tears.

As Hugh Breckenridge, protesting at the lateness of the hour, marshalled his friends into the great car at the door, Doctor Brainard came out of Mrs. Kelcey's house and ran across to the curb.

"Don wants me to tell you that the baby's pulled through. It's gone off to sleep with his finger in its fist, and he won't leave it. He says 'good-night' to you."

"Was it the prayer or the potion that saved it, Doctor?" questioned Breckenridge in his caustic tone.

"I don't know," said the doctor—and there was something new and gentle in his voice. "It was very nearly beyond potions—I'm inclined to think it was the prayer."

An hour afterward, Doctor Brainard, sitting

wide-awake and thoughtful before Brown's fire, was aware of the quiet entrance of the younger man. He looked up, and a radiant smile met him.

"Still doing well, I see, Don."

Brown nodded. He sank down into the chair opposite the doctor and ran his hand through his hair. In spite of the brightness of his face the gesture betrayed weariness.

Doctor Brainard got up. He went over to the corner where his overcoat hung upon a peg in the wall, and took from a pocket a small instrument composed mostly of tubes. He inserted certain earpieces in his ears and returned to the fire.

"Sit up and let me get at you," he commanded.

Brown glanced round, saw the doctor's grotesque appearance with the stethoscope in position, and shook his head.

"That's not fair. I was up rather early, and

it's been a fairly full day—and night. Take me in the morning."

"I'll take you right now, when you're tired enough to show up whatever's there. Coat off, please."

He made his examination painstakingly, omitting no detail of his inquiry into the state of both heart and lungs.

"What would you say if I told you you were in a bad way?" he asked.

Brown smiled. "I shouldn't believe you. I know you too well. You can't disguise the fact that you find nothing new, and the old things improved. I know I'm stronger than I was a year ago. Why shouldn't I be—with nothing to do but take care of myself?"

The doctor whistled. "How do you make that out, that 'nothing to do?'"

"With the demands of a great parish off my shoulders the little I do here is child's play."

"After I left you with the baby," said the

doctor, "Mrs. Kelcey followed me into the other room and told me a few things. In your old parish you had your sleep o' nights. In your new one I should say you spend the sleeping hours in activity."

"In my old parish," said Brown, studying the fire with an odd twist at the corners of his lips, "I lay awake nights worrying over my problems. Here, I'm asleep the minute my head touches the pillow. Isn't that a gain?"

"Too weary to do anything else, I suppose. Well, I shall have to admit that you are improved—surprisingly so. You are practically well. But what I can't understand is how a man of your calibre, your tastes, your fineness of make-up, can stand consorting with these people. Be honest, now. After such a visit as you've had to-night with the old friends, don't you feel a bit like giving in and coming back to us?"

Brown lifted his head. "Doctor," said he, slowly, and with a peculiar emphasis which made

his friend study his face closely, "if the Devil wanted to put temptation in my way, just as I have decided on my future course, he did it by sending you and the others down here to-night. If I could have jumped into that car with the rest of you, and by that one act put myself back in the old place, I would have done it—but for one thing. And that's the sure knowledge that soft living makes me soft. I love the good things of this life so that they unfit me for real service. Do you know what was the matter with my heart when I came away? I do. It was high living. It was sitting with my legs under the mahogany of my millionaire parishioners' tables, driving in their limousines, drinking afternoon tea with their wives, letting them send me to Europe whenever I looked a bit pale. Soft! I was a down pillow, a lump of putty. I, who was supposed to be a fighter for the Lord!"

"Nonsense, man!" cried the doctor, now thoroughly aroused. "You were the hardest

worker in the city. Your organizations—your charities——"

"My organizations, my charities!" The words came in a tone of contempt. "They were all in fine working order when I came to them. They continued to work, with no help from me. They are working quite as well now in my absence as they did in my presence. St. Timothy's is a great, strong society of the rich, and the man they engage to preach to them on Sundays has mighty little to do that any figurehead couldn't do as well. Down here—well, there is something to do which won't get done unless I do it. And if this neighbourhood, or any other similar one, needs me, there's no question that still more do I need the neighbourhood."

"In other words," said the doctor, "Mrs. Kelcey can do more for you than Bruce Brainard?"

The look which met his frown was comprehending. "Doctor," said Brown, "every man

knows his own weakness. I like the society of Bruce Brainard so well that when I'm in it I can forget all the pain and sorrow in the world. When I'm with Mrs. Kelcey I have to remember the hurt, and the grind, and the hardness of life —and it's good for me. It helps me, as St. Paul said, to '*keep under my body and bring it into subjection.*'"

"That's monkish doctrine."

"No, it's St. Paul's, I tell you. Remember the rest of it?—'*lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway!*'"

"You! A castaway!" The doctor laughed.

Brown nodded, rising. "You can see a long way into a man's body, Doctor, but not so far into his soul. There's been a pretty rotten place in mine. . . . Come, shall we go to bed? It's almost two."

The doctor assented, and Brown went into his bedroom to make it ready for his guest. Closing

the drawers he had opened in such haste two hours before, his eye was caught by something unfamiliar. Against one of the framed photographs which stood upon the top of the chest leaned a new picture, unframed. By the light of the small lamp he had brought into the room he examined it. As the face before him was presented to his gaze he stopped breathing for the space of several thudding heartbeats.

Out of the veiling brown mists of the picture looked a pair of eyes at which one glance had long been of more moment to him than the chance to look long and steadily into other eyes. The exquisite lines of a face which, having seen, men did not forget, were there before him, in his possession. It was the face of the woman, young and rich with beauty and with worldly wealth, who had, three years before, refused to marry Donald Brown.

"How did this come here? Did Sue leave it? Or did *you?*" He questioned the photograph

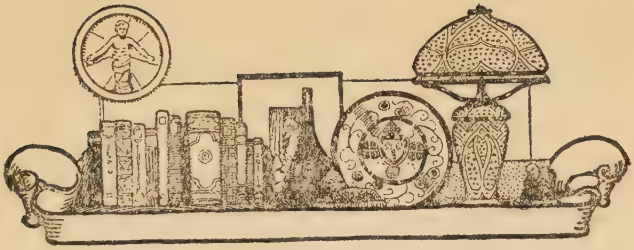
in his mind, staring at it with eager eyes. "Wasn't it enough for you to come here to-night, to make me realize how far apart we are? You like to play with men's hearts—so they say. Don't you think it's a bit cruel to play with mine —now?"

But he looked and looked at the enchanting face. And even as he looked Doctor Brainard called out from the other room:

"By the way, Don, I suppose you've noticed that Atchison seems to be getting on with his suit. Everybody thinks it's either an engagement or likely to be one soon. Pretty fine match, eh?"

It was a full minute before the answer came. When it did it sounded a little as if the speaker had his head in the clothespress which opened from the small bedroom, albeit the tone was gay enough:

"Webb's one of the best men I know. He deserves to win whatever he wants. Do you like a hard pillow or a soft, Doctor?"



XII

BROWN'S OLD WORLD

On a certain morning in February, Mrs. Hugh Breckenridge alighted in haste from her limousine in front of a stately apartment house in the best quarter of a great city. She hurried through the entrance hall to the lift and was taken up with smooth speed to the seventh story. In a minute more she was eagerly pressing the button at the door of a familiar suite of rooms into which she had not had occasion to enter for more than a year, for the very good reason that they had been closed and unoccupied in the absence of their tenant.

The returned tenant himself opened the door to her, a tall figure looming in the dusk of an un-

lighted corridor—a tall figure infinitely dear to Sue Breckenridge.

"O Don!" cried the visitor in an accusing tone. "How could you come back without letting us know?"

"I've been back only an hour," explained Donald Brown, submitting to and warmly returning his sister's embrace. "How in the world did you hear of it so soon? Did Brainard——"

She nodded. "Mrs. Brainard called me up at once, of course. She knew you couldn't be serious in trying to keep people from knowing you were here, least of all your sister!"

"I was intending to come to you before luncheon; I only meant to surprise you. As for the rest—I should be glad if they needn't know; at least until I'm ready to leave."

"To leave! Don! You're not going to persist in going back! It can't be true! You won't give up this apartment—tell me you won't!"

His sister's tone was anguished. Before he answered Brown led her into the library of the suite, the room in which he had been occupied when her ring came, and put her into a big arm-chair, taking from her her wrap and furs. Then he sat down upon the edge of a massive mahogany writing-table near by, crossing his long legs and folding his arms, while she mutely waited for him to speak.

"Sue," he said—and his face had in it a sort of reflection of the pain in hers—"you may be sure I haven't come to this decision without a deal of thought. But I've made it, and I'm going to stick to it because I believe it's the thing for me to do. I assure you that since I came into these rooms they have been beseeching me, as loudly as inanimate things can, not to desert them. I'm going to find it the hardest task of my life to take leave of them."

"Don't take leave of them! Lock them up for another year, if you must persist in your experi-

ment, but don't, *don't* burn your bridges behind you! Oh, how can you think of leaving your splendid church and going off to consign yourself to oblivion, living with poor people the rest of your days? You—*you*—Don!—I can't believe it of you!"

His face, in his effort at repression, grew stern. His folded arms became tense in the muscles.

"Don't make it harder for me than it is. I can't discuss it with you, because though I argued till I was dumb I could never make you see what I see. Accept my decision, Sue dear, and don't try my soul by pleading with me. . . . I have a lot to do. I should like your help. See here, would you care to have any of my things? Look about you. This is rather a good rug under your feet. Will you have it—and any others you fancy?"

She looked down at the heavy Eastern rug, exquisite in its softness and richness of colouring.

It was one of which, knowing its value, she had long envied her brother the possession. She put up her hand and brushed away the mist from her eyes.

"Aren't you going to take *any* comfortable things with you? Are you going to go on living on pine chairs and rag carpets—you, who were brought up on rugs like this?"

He nodded. "For the most part. I've been wondering if I might indulge myself in one big easy chair, just for old times. But I'm afraid it won't do."

"Oh, mercy, Don! Why *not?*"

"How should I explain its presence, opposite my red-cushioned rocker? Give it a good look, Sue, that chair, and tell me honestly if I can afford to introduce such an incongruous note into my plain bachelor house up there."

She surveyed the chair in question, a luxurious and costly type standing for the last word in masculine comfort and taste. It was one which

had been given to Brown by Webb Atchison, and had long been a favourite.

"Oh, I don't know," she said hopelessly, shaking her head. "I can't decide for any monk what he shall take into his cell."

Brown flushed, a peculiar dull red creeping up under his dark skin. He smothered the retort on his lips, however, and when he did speak it was with entire control, though there was, nevertheless, an uncompromising quality in his inflection which for the moment silenced his sister as if he had laid his hand upon her mouth.

"Understand me, once for all, Sue—if you can. I am going into no monastery. To such a man as I naturally am, I am going out of what has been a sheltered life into one in the open. You think of me as retiring from the world. Instead of that, I am just getting into the fight. And to fight well—I must go stripped."

She shook her head again and walked over to

the window, struggling with very real emotion. At once he was beside her, and his arm was about her shoulders. He spoke very gently now.

"Don't take it so hard, dear girl. I'm not going to be so far away that I can never come back. You will see me from time to time. I couldn't get on without my one sister—with father and mother gone, and the brothers at the other side of the world. Come, cheer up, and help me decide what disposal to make of my stuff. Will you take the most of it?"

She turned about, presently, dried her eyes determinedly, and surveyed the room. It was a beautiful room, the sombre hues of its book-lined walls relieved by the rich and mellow tones of its rugs and draperies, the distinguished furnishings of the writing-table, and the subdued gleam of a wonderful reading-lamp of wrought copper which had been given to Brown by Sue herself.

"If you will let me," she said, "I'll give up one room to your things and put all these into it. Aren't you even going to take your books?"

"I must—a couple of hundred, at least. I can't give up such old friends as these."

"A couple of hundred—out of a couple of thousand!"

"There are five thousand in this room," said Brown cheerfully. "But two hundred will give me a very good selection of favourites, and I can change them from time to time. I have sixty or seventy already with me. . . . Hello! Who can that be? Has Brainard been giving me away right and left?"

He answered the ring, and admitted Webb Atchison, rosy of cheek and rather lordly of appearance, as always. The bachelor came in, frowning even as he smiled, and bringing to Donald Brown a vivid suggestion of old days.

"Caught!" he cried, shaking hands.

"Thought you could sneak in and out of town like a thief in the night, did you? It can't be done, old man."

He was in a hurry and could stay but ten minutes. Five of those he devoted to telling Brown what he thought of the news he had heard, by which he understood that St. Timothy's was to lose permanently the man whom it had expected soon to have back. Brown listened with head a little down-bent, arms folded again, lips set in lines of determination. He had been fully prepared for the onslaughts of his friends, but that fact hardly seemed to make it easier to meet them. When Atchison had delivered himself uninterrupted, Brown lifted his head with a smile.

"Through, Webb?" he asked.

"No, I'm not through, by a long shot, but it's all I have time for now, for I came on a different matter. Since I heard you were here I've been telephoning around, and I've got together a little

dinner-party for to-night that you won't evade if you have a particle of real affection for me. I'm not going to be cheated out of it. It'll be a hastily arranged affair, but there may be something decent to eat and drink. Brainard tells me you're not going to linger in town an hour after your business is done, so I thought best to lose no time. You'll come, of course? The way you're looking just now I don't know but you're equal to refusing me even such a small favour as this one!"

Brown crossed the room, to lay his hands on Atchison's shoulders. His eyes were dark with suppressed feeling.

"My dear old friend," said he affectionately, "I wish you wouldn't take the thing this way. I'm not dealing blows at those I love; if I'm dealing them at anybody it's at myself. I can't possibly tell you what it means to me—this crisis. I can only ask you not to think hardly of me. As for the dinner, if it will please you to

have me agree to it I will, only—I should a little rather have you stand me up against a wall and take a shot at me!"

"For a deserter?"

Atchison spoke out of his grief and anger, not from belief in the motive he imputed. When he saw Donald Brown turn white and clench the hands he dropped from his friend's shoulders, Atchison realized what he had done. He winced under the sting of the quick and imperious command which answered him:

"Take that back, Webb!"

"I do—and apologize," said the other man instantly, and tears smarted under his eyelids. "You know I didn't mean it, Don. But—hang it all!—I'm bitterly disappointed and I can't help showing it."

"Disappointed in me—or in my act?" Brown was still stern.

"In your act, of course. I'm bound to acknowledge that it must take a brave man to cut

cables the way you're doing—a mighty brave man."

"I don't care about being considered brave, but I won't be called a coward."

"I thought," said Atchison, trying to smile, "there was something in your Bible about turning the other cheek."

"There is," said Brown steadily. "And I do it when I come to your dinner. But between now and then I'll knock you down if you insult the course I've laid out for myself."

The two men gazed at each other, the one the thorough man of the world with every sign of its prospering touch upon him, the other looking somehow more like a lean and hardened young soldier of the army than a student of theology. Both pairs of eyes softened. But it was Atchison's which gave way first.

"Confound you, Don—it's because of that splendidly human streak in you that we love you here. You've always seemed to have enough

personal acquaintance with the Devil and his works to make you understand the rest of us, and refrain from being too hard on us."

At which Sue Breckenridge—who had been listening with tense-strung nerves to the interview taking place in her presence—laughed, with an hysterical little sob shaking her. Both men looked at her.

"Poor Sue," said Brown. "She doesn't like to have you quarrel with me, yet it's all she can do to keep from quarrelling with me herself! Between you, if you don't undermine my purpose, it will be only because I've been preparing my defenses for a good while and have strong patrols out at the weak points."

"I give you fair warning. I'll undermine it yet if I can," and Atchison gripped Brown's hand with fervor before he went away, charging Sue Breckenridge with the responsibility of bringing her brother to the dinner to be given that evening.

"Now, what"—said Brown, turning to his

writing-table when Atchison had gone, and absently picking up a bronze paper-weight which lay there—"put it into his head to fire a dinner at me the moment he knew I was here?"

"We all have a suspicion," said Sue, watching him as she spoke, "that he and Helena are ready to announce their engagement. It may have popped into his head that with you here it was just the time to do it. Of course," she went on hurriedly, in answer to something she thought she saw leap into her brother's face, "we don't absolutely know that they're engaged. He's been devoted for a good while, and since he's never been much that sort with women it looks as if it meant something."

"It looks it on his part," said Brown, opening a drawer in the table and appearing to search therein. "Does it look it on hers?"

"Not markedly so. But Helena's getting on—she must be twenty-six or seven—and she always seems happy with him. Of course that's

no evidence, for she has such a charmingly clever way with men you never can tell when she's bored—and certainly they can't. It's just that it seems such a splendidly fitting match we're confident there's ground for our expectations."

"I see. Altogether, that dinner promises well for sensations—of one sort or another. Meanwhile, shall we pitch into business?"

Together they went through Brown's apartment, which was a large one, and comprised everything which he had once considered necessary to the comfort of a bachelor establishment. As he looked over that portion of the place pertaining to the cooking and serving of food he smiled rather grimly at the contrast it inevitably brought to his mind. Standing before the well-filled shelves in the butler's pantry he eyed a certain cherished set of Sèvres china, thinking of the cheap blue-and-white ware which now filled all his needs, and recalling with a sense of amuse-

ment the days, not so long past, when he would have considered himself ill served had his breakfast appeared in such dishes.

"It's all in the way you look at it, Sue," he exclaimed, opening the doors of leaded glass and taking down a particularly choice example of the ceramic art in the shape of a large Satsuma plate. "Look at that, now! Why should a chop taste any better off that plate than off the one I ate from this morning at daybreak? It tastes no better—I vow it doesn't taste as good. I've a keener appetite now than last year, when Sing Lee, my Chinese cook, was cudgelling his Asiatic brains to tempt me."

"That's not the way I look at it," Sue answered mournfully. "To me it makes all the difference in the world how food is served, not to mention how it is cooked. Do you ever have anything but bacon and eggs at that dreadful place of yours?"

"Bless your heart, yes! I don't deny myself

good food, child—get that out of your mind. Why, just night before last Jennings and I had an oyster roast, on the half-shell, over the coals in my fireplace. My word, but they were good! If Webb can give us anything better than that to-night he'll surprise me."

"Who is Jennings? A laundryman or a policeman?"

"Neither. Jennings is a clerk in the office of a great wholesale hardware house. He was down on his luck, a while back, but he's pulled out of his trouble. When his wife's called out of town, as she often is by the old people back home, he keeps me company. He's particularly fond of roasted oysters, is Jennings, since a certain night when I introduced them to his unaccustomed palate. It's great fun to see him devour them."

Sue shook her head again. She could seem to do little else these days, being in a perpetual state of wonder and regret over that which she could

not understand—quite as her brother had said. He sent her away an hour before luncheon time, telling her that he would follow when he had attended to certain matters in which she could not help. Having put her into her car, he waved a cheery hand at her as she drove away, and returned to his apartment. He lingered a little at the lift to ask after the welfare of the young man who operated it, whom he had known in past days; but presently he was in his library again with the door locked behind him. And here for a brief space business was suspended.

Before the big leather chair he fell upon his knees, burying his head in his arms.

"*Oh, good Father,*" said Brown, just above his breath, "*only Thou canst help me through this thing. It's even harder than I thought it would be. I want the old life, I want the old love—my heart is weak within me at the thought of giving them up. . . . I know the temptation comes*

not from without but from within. It's my own weak self that is my enemy, not the lure of the life I'm giving up. . . . Give me strength—fighting strength. . . . Help me—'not to give in while I can stand and see.'"

Presently he rose to his feet. He was pale, but in his face showed the renewed strength of purpose he had asked for. He set about the task of packing the few things he meant to take with him, working with a certain unhurried efficiency which accomplished no small amount in that hour before luncheon. Then he descended to find his sister's car waiting for him, and was whirled away.

XIII

BROWN'S TRIAL BY FLOOD

At nine o'clock that night, feeling a little as if he were in some sort of familiar dream, Brown, wearing evening dress for the first time in more than a year, sat looking about him. He was at Mrs. Brainard's right hand, in the post of the guest of honour, for Mrs. Brainard was playing hostess for her bachelor friend, Webb Atchison, in the apartment of the princely up-town hotel which was his more or less permanent home.

About the great round table were gathered a goodly company—the company of Brown's old friends among the rich and eminent of the city. Not only men of great wealth, but men dis-

tinguished in their professions, noted for their achievements, and honoured for their public services, were among those hurriedly asked to do this man honour. They had all been more or less constant members of his congregation during the years when he was making a name as the most forceful and fearless young preacher who ever ventured to tell the people of aristocratic St. Timothy's what he thought of them.

And they were gathered to-night to tell him what they thought of him. They were sparing no pains to do so. More than once, while he parried their attacks upon his resolution to leave them permanently, parried them with a smiling face, with a resolute quiet voice, with the quickness of return thrust for which he was famous in debate, he was inwardly sending up one oft-repeated, pregnant petition: "*Lord, help me through this—for Thy sake!*"

They were not men alone who combined

against him with every pressure of argument; there were women present who used upon him every art of persuasion. Not that of speech alone, but that subtler witchery of look and smile with which such women well know how to make their soft blows tell more surely than harder ones from other hands. Among these, all of whom were women of charm and distinction after one fashion or another, was one who alone, though she seemed to be making no direct attack, was waging the heaviest war of all against Donald Brown's determination.

Atchison, in arranging the places of his guests, had put Helena Forrest at Brown's right, at the sacrifice of his own pleasure, for by this concession she was farthest from himself. Whether or not he understood how peculiarly deadly was the weapon he thus used against his friend, he knew that Helena was capable of exerting a powerful influence upon any man—how should he himself not know it, who was at her feet? He

had no compunction in bringing that influence to bear upon Brown at this moment, when the actual word of withdrawal had not yet been spoken.

Yet as from time to time Atchison looked toward these two of his guests he wondered if Helena were doing all she could in the cause in which he had enlisted her. She was saying little to Brown, he could see that; and Brown was saying even less to her. Each seemed more occupied with the neighbour upon the farther side than with the other. Just what this meant Atchison could not be sure.

The dinner, an affair of surprising magnificence considering the brief hours of its preparation, drew at length to its close. It seemed to Brown that he had been sitting at that table, in the midst of the old environment in which he had once been carelessly happy and assured, for hours upon end, before the signal came at last for the departure of the women. And even then

he knew that after they had gone the worst was probably to come.

It came. Left alone with him, the men of the party redoubled their attacks. With every argument, renewed and recast, they assaulted him. He withstood them, refusing at the last to argue, merely lifting his head with a characteristic gesture of determination, smiling wearily, and saying with unshaken purpose: "It's no use, gentlemen. I've made up my mind. I'm sorry you think I'm wrong, but I can't help that, since I believe I'm right."

They could not credit their own failure, these men of power, so accustomed to having things go their way that they were unable to understand even the possibility of being defeated. And they were being defeated by a man whom they had never admired more—and they had made him, as Sue Breckenridge had said, the idol of the great church—than now when he re-

fused them. But they, quite naturally, did not show him that. They showed him disappointment, chagrin, cynicism, disbelief in his judgment, everything that could make his heart beat hard and painfully with the weight of their displeasure.

Suddenly he rose to his feet. A hush fell, for they thought he was going to speak to them. He was silent for a minute, looking down at these old friends who were so fond of him; then he opened his mouth. But not to speak—to sing.

It was a powerful asset of Donald Brown's, and it had never been more powerful than now, this voice which had been given him of heaven. They had often heard him before but now, under these strange circumstances, they listened with fresh amazement to the beauty of his tones. Every word fell clean-cut upon their ears, every note was rich with feeling, as Brown in this strange fashion made his plea, took his

stand with George Matheson's deathless words of passionate loyalty:

"Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within Thy arms,
And strong shall be my hand."

When they looked up, these men, they saw that the women of the party had come back to the doors, drawn by an irresistible force.

In a strange silence, broken only by low-spoken words, the whole company returned to the living-rooms of the apartment. Here Brown himself broke the spell he had laid upon them.

Speaking in the ringing voice they knew of old, and with a gesture of both arms outflung as

if he threw himself upon their friendship, he cried blithely:

"Ah, give me a good time now, dear people! Let me play I'm yours and you are mine again—just for to-night."

That settled it. Webb Atchison brought his hand down upon his victim's shoulder with a resounding friendly blow, calling:

"He's right. We've given him a bad two hours of it. Let's make it up to him, and let him have the right sort of send-off—since he will go. He will—there's no possible question of that. So let's part friends."

"I don't know," said Brown, smiling in the midst of the faces which now gave him back his smile, "but that if you are kind to me you'll test my endurance still more heavily. But—we'll risk it."

The scene now became a gay one—gay, at least, upon the surface. Brown was his old self again, the one they had known, and he was the

centre of the good-fellowship which now reigned. So, for a time. Then came the supreme test of his life—as unexpectedly as such tests come, when a man thinks he has won through to the thin edge of the struggle.

XIV

BROWN'S TRIAL BY FIRE

He had gone alone into a den of Atchison's, where was kept a medley of books and pipes and weapons, a bachelor collection of trophies of all sorts. He was in search of a certain loving-cup which had been mentioned and asked for, and Atchison himself had for the moment left the apartment to see an insistent caller below. The den was at some distance from the place where the company was assembled, and Brown could hear their voices only in the remote distance as he searched.

Suddenly a light sound as of the movement of silken draperies fell upon his ear, and at the same instant a low voice spoke. He swung about, to

see a figure before him at sight of which, alone as he had been with it for months, he felt his unsubdued heart leap in his breast. By her face he knew she had followed him for a purpose. He let her speak.

"Donald Brown," she said—and she spoke fast and breathlessly, as if she feared, as he did, instant interruption and this were her only chance—"what you have said to-night makes me forget everything but what I want you to know."

Quite evidently her heart was beating synchronously with his, for he could see how it shook her. He stared at her, at the lovely line and colour of cheek and chin, at the wonderful shadowed eyes, at the soft darkness of her heavy hair. She was wearing misty white to-night, with one great red rose upon her breast; she was such a sight as might well blind a man, even if he were not already blind with love of her. The fragrance of the rose was in his nostrils—it

assailed his senses as if it were a part of her, its fragrance hers. But he did not speak.

"You asked me something once," she went on, with an evident effort. "Would you mind telling me if—if——"

But he would not help her. He could not believe he understood what she meant to say.

"You make it very hard for me," she murmured. "Yet I believe I understand why, if this thing is ever said at all, I must be the one to say it. Do you—Donald—do you—still—care?"

"*O God!*" he cried in his heart. "*O God! Couldn't You have spared me this?*"

But aloud, after an instant, he said, a little thickly, "I think you know without asking. I shall never stop caring."

She lifted her eyes. "Then——" and she waited.

He must speak. She had done her part. His head swam with the sudden astounding revelation that she was his for the taking, if—— Ah,

but the *if!* He knew too well what that must mean.

"Are you tempting me, too?" he asked, with sudden fierceness. "Do you mean—like all the rest—I may have you if—I give up my purpose and stay here?"

Mutely her eyes searched his. Dumb with the agony of it his searched hers in return. He turned away.

"Don!" Her voice was all low music. The words vibrated appealingly; she had seen what it meant to him. She put out one hand as if to touch him—and drew it back. "Listen to me, please. I know—I know—what a wonderful sacrifice you are making. I admire and honour you for it—I do. But—think once more. This great parish—surely there is work for you here, wonderful work. Won't you do it—*with me?*"

He looked at her with sudden decision on his course.

"You left that photograph?" He spoke huskily.

She nodded.

"You left it there, in my poor house. I've cherished it there. It hasn't suffered. You wouldn't suffer. Will you live—and work—with me—*there?*"

"Oh!" She drew back. "How can you—— Do you realize what you ask?"

"I don't ask it expecting to receive it. I know it's impossible—from your viewpoint. But—it's—all I have to ask——"

He broke off, fighting savagely with the desire to seize her in his arms that was all but overmastering him.

She moved away a step in her turn, standing with down-bent head, the partial line of her profile, the curve of her neck and beautiful shoulder, presenting an even greater appeal to the devouring flame of his longing than her eyes had done. It seemed to him that he would give

the heart out of his body even to press his lips upon that fair flesh just below the low-drooping masses of her hair, flesh exquisite as a child's in contrast with the dark locks above it. All the long months of his exile pressed upon him with mighty force to urge him to assuage his loneliness with this divine balm.

Suddenly she spoke, just above a whisper. "I wonder," she said, "if any woman ever humiliated herself—like this—to be so refused."

He answered that with swift, eager words: "It is the most womanly, the most wonderful thing, any woman could do for a man. I shall never forget it, or cease to honour you for it. I love you—*love you*—for it—ten thousand times more than I loved you before, if that can be. I *must* say it. I must put it into words that you and I can both remember, or I think my heart will burst. But—Helena—I have vowed this vow to my God. I have put my hand to this plow. I can't turn back—not even for you. No man,

having done that, '*and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*' He isn't fit for the kingdoms of earth, either. He isn't fit for—hell!"

Very slowly she moved away from him, her head still drooping. At the door she did not pause and look back, actress-like, to try him with one more look. She went like a wounded thing. And at the sight, the wild impulse to rush after her and cry to her that nothing in the wide universe mattered, so that she should lift that head and lay it on his breast, gripped him and wrung him, till drops of moisture started out upon his forehead, and he turned sick. Then she was out of sight, and he stood grasping the back of a chair, fighting for control. This was a dinner-party—a dinner-party! Kind God in heaven! And he and she must go back to those other people and smile and talk, must somehow cover it all up. How was it conceivably to be done?

She could do it, perhaps. After all, it could

not be the soul-stirring thing to her that it was to him. She loved him enough to be his wife—under the old conditions. She did not love him enough to go with him as his wife into the new conditions. Then she could not be suffering as he was suffering. Wounded pride—she was feeling that, no doubt of it—wounded pride is not a pleasant thing to feel. She loved him somewhat, loved him enough to take the initiative in this scene to-night. But real love—she could not know what that was, or she would follow him to the ends of the earth. It was the woman's part to follow, not the man's. Hers to give up her preference for his duty. Since she could not do this, she did not really love him. This was the bitterest drop in the whole bitter cup!

Footsteps came rapidly along the corridor. Webb Atchison appeared in the doorway. At the first sound of his return Brown had wheeled and was found standing before a cabinet, in

which behind glass doors was kept a choice collection of curios from all parts of the world. He was trying to summon words to explain that he was looking for a certain loving-cup—*a loving-cup*—when one had just been presented, full to overflowing, to his thirsty lips, and he had refused to drink!

But Atchison was full of his message.

"Don, I've done my best to put the fellow off, but he will see you. Hang it!—to-night of all nights! I don't know why that following of yours should pursue you to this place. I suspect it will be considerable of a jolt to that chap to see you in an expanse of white shirt-front. But it seems somebody has been taken worse since you left, and insists on seeing you. Why in thunder did you leave an address for them to find you at?"

By the time Atchison had delivered himself of all this Brown had hold of himself, could turn and speak naturally. The news had been like a

dash of cold water in the face of a fainting man.

"Who is worse—Mr. Benson?"

"Think that was the name—an old man. The messenger's waiting, though I told him you certainly couldn't go back to-night."

"I certainly shall go back to-night. Where is he?"

Expostulating uselessly, Atchison led the way. Brown found Andrew Murdison standing with a look of dogged determination on his face, which changed to one of relief when he saw Brown. Old Benson, the watchmaker, who had been convalescing from illness when Brown came away, had suffered a relapse and had probably but few hours to live.

With a brief leave-taking, in the course of which Brown held for an instant the hand of Helena Forrest and found it cold as ice in his grasp, he went away. As the train bore him swiftly back to the place he had left so recently,

certain words came to him and stayed by him, fitting themselves curiously to the rhythmic roar of the train:

"*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"

And the car wheels, as they turned, seemed to be saying, mile after mile: "*A way to escape—a way to escape—a way to escape!*"

XV

BROWN'S BROWN STUDY

Standing in his kitchen doorway, Brown looked out into his back yard.

It was, in one way, an unusual back yard for that quarter of the city, and in that one way it differed from the back yards of his neighbours. While theirs were bounded on all sides by high and ugly board fences, his was encompassed by a stone wall standing even higher, and enclosing the small area of possibly forty feet by thirty in a privacy quite unknown elsewhere in the district. This stone wall had been laid by the Englishman who had built the house, his idea of having things to himself being the product of his early life in a country where not only is every man's

house his castle, but the surrounding ground thereof, as well, his domain, from which he would keep out every curious eye.

It was an evening in mid-April. Brown had opened the big oak door to let the late western light of the spring day flood his kitchen, while he washed and put away the dishes lately used for his supper—and for that of a forlorn and ill-used specimen of tramp humanity who had arrived as he was sitting down.

He was presently to address a gathering of factory girls in a near-by schoolhouse; and he was trying, as he stood in the door, with the soft spring air touching gratefully his face, to gather his thoughts together for the coming talk. But he was weary with a long day's labours, and somehow his eyes could summon no vision of the faces he was to see. Instead——

"There ought to be a garden back here," he said to himself. "If I'm to stay here for the coming year—as it looks as if I must—I should

cultivate this little patch and make it smile a bit. As it is, it's doing no good to anybody, not even Bim. He's pretty careless about his bones out here, and leaves them around instead of burying 'em decently. I must teach him better. This would be a good place to bring the children into, if it had some flowers in it."

The notion cheered him a little, as the thought of flowers in the spring has a way of doing. He made a rough plan of the garden, in his mind, laying out beds of sturdy bloom, training vines to cover the bleak expanse of stone, even planting a small tree or two of rapid growth—for the benefit of whomever should follow him as a tenant of the old house. Presently he closed the door with some sense of refreshment, mental and physical, and forced his thoughts into the channel it was now imperative they should occupy.

He took his way to the meeting in the schoolhouse, however, with a step less rapid than was usually his. It might have been the enervating

influence of the mild spring air; it might have been the pressure of certain recollections which he had not yet succeeded, in the two months which had passed since the farewell dinner at Webb Atchison's, in so putting aside that they should not often depress and at times even dominate his spirit. Though he had left the old life completely behind him, and had settled into the new with all the conviction and purpose he could summon, he was subject, especially when physically weary, as to-night, to a heaviness of heart which would not be mastered.

"But I must—*I must*—stiffen my back," he said sternly to himself, as he neared the dingy schoolhouse toward which, from all directions, he could see his audience making its way. It was not the first time he had addressed these girls and women, in so informal and unostentatious a manner that no one of his hearers had so much as suspected his profession, but had taken him for one of their own class. "He's got a way

with him," they put it, "that makes you feel like you could listen to him all night." The sight of them now provided the stimulus he needed, and as he smiled and nodded at two or three whom he had personally met he felt the old interest in his task coming to his aid.

And in a brief space he was standing before them telling them the things he had come to tell. It was not his message he had lacked—that had been made ready long before the hour—it was only the peculiar power and magnetism of speech and manner which had been the treasure of St. Timothy's, that he had felt himself unable to summon as he came to this humble audience. But now, as almost always, he was able to use every art at his command to capture their attention, to hold it, to carry it from point to point, and finally to drive his message home with appealing force. And this message was, as always, the simple message of belief in the things which make for righteousness.

Not all his auditors could arrive on time; they were obliged to come when they could. Brown's talks had to be subject to constant though painstakingly muffled interruptions, as one after another stole into the room. His attraction for his hearers, however, once he was fairly launched, was so great that there were few wandering eyes or minds. Therefore, to-night, when he had been speaking for a quarter of an hour, the quiet entrance of two figures which found places near the door at the back of the room disturbed nobody, and caused only a few heads to turn in their direction.

Those who did note the arrivals saw that they were strangers to the assembly. They saw something else, also, though they could not have told what it was. The two women, one young, one of middle age, were plainly dressed in cheap suits of dark serge, such as many of the working-women were wearing. Their hats were of the simplest and most inexpensive design, though

lacking any of the commonplace finery to be seen everywhere throughout the room. But there was about the pair an undeniable since unconcealable air of difference, of refinement if it were only in the manner in which they slipped into their seats and fixed their eyes upon the speaker, with no glances to right or left. The eyes which noted them noted also that both were possessed of faces such as need no accessories of environment to make them hold the gaze of all about them.

"Settlement folks," guessed one girl to another, with a slight curl of the lip.

"*Sh-h—!* Who cares what they are when *he's* talkin'?" gave back the other—and settled again to listening.

Brown had seen the newcomers, but they were far back in the room, which was by no means brilliantly lighted, and beneath the shadows of their hats there was for him no hint of acquaintance. He therefore proceeded, untrammelled by

a knowledge which would surely have been his undoing had he possessed it at that stage of the evening. He went on interesting, touching, appealing to his listeners, waging war upon their hearts with all the skill known to the valiant, forceful speaker. Yet such was his apparent simplicity of method that he seemed to all but two of those who heard him to be merely talking with them about the things which concerned them.

His was not the ordinary effort of the amateur social worker—such though he felt himself to be. He had not a word to say to his hearers about "conditions"; he gave them no impression of having studied them and their environment till he knew more about it all than they did—or thought he did. He brought to them only what they felt, consciously or unconsciously, to be an intimate understanding of the human heart, whether it were found beating under the coarse garments of the factory hand or the silken ones

of the "swells up-town." Gently but searchingly he showed them their own hearts, showed them the ugly things, the strange things, the wonderful things, of their own hearts—and then, when he had those hearts beating heavily and painfully before him, applied the healing balm of his message. Hard eyes grew soft, weary faces brightened, despairing mouths set with new resolve, and when the hour ended there seemed a clearer atmosphere, a different spirit, in the crowded room, than that which earlier had pervaded it.

"Say, ain't he what I told you?" One girl, passing near the two strangers as the company dispersed, inquired of another. "Don't it seem like he knows what you don't know yourself about how you're feelin'?"

"You can't be so down in the mouth when you're listenin' to him," was another comment which reached ears strained to attention. "You feel like there was some good livin', after all.

Did Liz come, d'ye know? She needs somethin' to make her buck up. If she'd jest hear him——"

Brown remained in the room till almost the last were gone. The two strangers waited at the door, their backs turned to the room, as if in conference. Several women stayed to speak with the man who had talked to them, and the waiting ones could hear his low tones, the same friendly, comprehending, interested tones to which St. Timothy's had grown so happily accustomed. At length the last lingerer passed the two by the door, and Brown, approaching, spoke to them.

"Did you want to see me? Is there anything I can do?" he began—and the two strangers turned.

His astonished gaze fell first upon Mrs. Brainard, her fine and glowing eyes fixed upon him with both mirth and tenderness in their look. She had been deeply touched by the sights and sounds of the hour just passed, yet the surprise

she had in store for her friend, Donald Brown, was moving her also, and her smile at him from under the plain little hat she wore was a brilliant one. But he stared at her for a full ten seconds before he could believe the testimony of his eyes. Was this—could this poss bly be—the lady of the distinguished dress and bearing, who stood before him in her cheap suit of serge, with a little gray cotton glove upon the hand she held out to him?

He seized the hand and wrung it, as if the very contact was much to him. His face broke into a smile of joy as he said fervently, "I don't know how this happens, but it's enough for me that it does."

"I'm not the only one present, Don," said the lady, laughing, and turned to her companion.

If he had given the second figure a thought as he recognized his old friend, it was to suppose her some working-girl who had conducted the stranger to the place. But now he looked, and saw Helena Forrest.

"*You!*" he breathed, and stood transfixed.

Miss Forrest had always been, though never conspicuously dressed, such a figure of quiet elegance that one who knew her could almost recognize her with her face quite out of sight. Now, without a single accessory of the sort which stands for high-bred fashion, her beauty flashed at Brown like that of one bright star in a sky of midnight gloom. She was not smiling, she was looking straight at him with her wonderful eyes, and in them was a strange and bewildering appeal.

For a moment he could not speak—he, who had been so eloquent within her hearing for the hour past. He looked at her, and looked again at Mrs. Brainard, and back at Helena again, and then he stammered, "I can't—quite—believe it is you—either of you!" and laughed at his own confusion, his face flushing darkly under the skin, clear to the roots of the heavy locks on his forehead.

"But you see it is," said Helena's low voice. "We are confident of that ourselves, for the journey has seemed a long one, under two smothering veils. And we hadn't the easiest time finding you."

Brown recovered himself. "You didn't motor over this time, then?"

"The last time we were here," Mrs. Brainard reminded him, "you told us quite frankly that you didn't care to have your friends arrive in limousines, or in velvet and sables. So—we have left both behind."

"I see you have. It was wonderfully kind of you, though the disguise is by no means a perfect one. I wonder if you can possibly think, either of you, that you looked like the rest of my audience!"

"Did you know us when we came in?" questioned Mrs. Brainard, with a merry glance. "I think you did not, Mr. Donald Brown!"

"How long have you been here?"

"We must have come in near the beginning of your talk. You didn't even see us then, did you?"

"I saw two figures which looked strange to me —but—the lights——"

"Oh, yes," agreed the lady, gayly, "the lights were poor. And you saw two working-women who were merely strangers to you, so you didn't look again."

"I'm glad I didn't recognize you."

"Why? We rather hoped you would—didn't we, dear?"

She looked at her companion, who nodded, smiling.

"We both hoped and feared, I think," Helena said.

"I couldn't have gone stumbling on," Brown explained. "I should have had to dismiss the meeting, telling them I had a rush of blood to the head—or to the heart!"

At this moment he was helped out by the

abrupt opening of the door beside him. A grimy-faced janitor looked in, wearing an expression of surly dissatisfaction. When he saw Brown the expression softened slightly, as if he knew a friend when he beheld him, but he did not withdraw. Brown rallied his absorbed faculties to appreciate what late hours meant to that busy janitor.

"Just leaving, Mr. Simpson," he said cheerfully, and led his visitors out into the school's anteroom.

"Are you at a hotel?" he asked, with eagerness, of Mrs. Brainard. "How can I—where can I——"

"We ran away," explained that lady promptly. "Not a soul knows where we are. We did not register at a hotel, for this is a secret expedition. We take the eleven-fifteen train back. Meanwhile, Don, am I not an acceptable chaperon? And won't my presence make it entirely proper for us to break a bit of bread with

you in your bachelor home? We had only afternoon tea before we left. We are very hungry—or I am!"

"Oh, if you will only do that!" he said with an inflection of great pleasure. "I shall be so tremendously honoured I shall hardly know how to express it. I hope I have something for you fit to eat. If I haven't——"

"Bacon and eggs," said Mrs. Brainard, with twinkling eyes, "are what your sister Sue insists you live on. Never in my life did I have such a longing for bacon and eggs!"

"Then you shall have them—or an omelet garnished with bacon. And the corner grocery has some lettuce and radishes. I believe I can even achieve a salad."

Brown led the way through the ill-lighted streets, not talking as he might have done in another quarter of the city, but hurrying them past places he could not bear to have them see, and making one détour to avoid taking them through

the poorest part of the neighbourhood. It was by no means a dangerous neighbourhood, but somehow he felt with these two rare women on his hands, as if he must guard them even from the ordinary sights to be had in the districts of the working class. And as he walked by their side it came upon him, as it had never done with such force before, that he could never seriously ask any woman from his own world to come and face such a life as the one he had chosen for the active years of his own.

Yet—he had also a curious feeling that he must not let that thought spoil for him the wonder of this visit. The hour was his, let him make the most of it. He had not so many happy hours that he could afford to lose one because it could be only one. He would not lose it.

XVI

BROWN'S NEW WORLD

So the house was reached—it was a dark and stern-looking little abode at this hour, with its windows unlighted, though usually the cheeriest on the square. Brown threw open the door and Bim sprang to meet him—turning aside, however, at sight of the strangers. Only a few embers glowed on the hearth, and the room was in darkness.

Brown closed the door behind them all. "Stand still, please," he said, "while I light up."

He threw some kindlings from a basket upon the fire, and they leaped into flame before he could light the lamp on his table. The room became a pleasant place at once, as any room must

in fire- and lamp-light, so that it contain such few essentials of living as did Brown's—the red-cushioned chair by the hearth, the books and magazines upon the table, the two fine portraits on the wall.

"Now, please make yourselves comfortable," Brown urged, indicating the austere little bedroom his friends remembered. "And if you'll do that I'll go at the joyous task of getting you some supper."

"You must let us help you," Mrs. Brainard offered.

"Never! What could you do, either of you, in a bachelor's kitchen?"

"But we want to see the bachelor at work there."

"Your presence might upset me," he called back, laughing, as he hurried away.

Two minutes later, after an inspection of his larder, he was rushing up the street to the corner grocery, having escaped by way of the back door.

If any of his friends of this quarter had happened to meet him under one of the scanty street lamps, they might have noted that the dark face, in these days usually so sober, to-night was alight with eagerness. Donald Brown's eyes were glowing, there was a touch of clear, excited colour on his cheek. His lips were all but smiling as he strode along. One hand was already in his pocket, feeling critically of the probable contents of the purse he longed to empty, to make a little feast for his so-welcome guests.

Arrived at Jim Burke's small store, the customer scanned the place anxiously, and it seemed to him that its supplies had never been so meagre. He succeeded in buying his lettuce, however, and a bottle of salad oil, and, remembering a can of asparagus tips on his own shelves, congratulated himself upon the attainment of his salad. Some eggs which the grocer swore were above reproach, and some small bakery cakes, completed the possibilities of the place for

quick consumption. Brown ran back to the house again, his arms full of parcels, his mind struggling with the incredible fact that under his roof was housed, if only for an hour or two, the one being whom he would give all but his soul to keep.

Entering his kitchen by its outer door he stopped short upon the threshold. A figure in a white blouse, blue serge skirt, and little white, beruffled apron, was arranging his table. The table had been drawn into the middle of the room, his simple supplies of linen and silver had been discovered, and the preparations were nearly complete. In the middle of the table in a glass bowl was a huge bunch of violets, come from he could not have guessed where, even if he had given any thought to the attempt.

But he gave no thought to anything but the figure before him. If Helena Forrest, in the silks and laces of her usual evening attire, had been always one of extraordinary charm, in her

present dress and setting she was infinitely more enchanting to the man who stood regarding her with his heart leaping into his throat. The whole picture she presented was one of such engaging domesticity that no bachelor who had suffered the loneliness this one had known so many months could fail to appreciate it.

He dropped his parcels and came forward. Mrs. Brainard was not in the room, and the door was closed between the kitchen and the living-room—by accident, or intention? The pulses in his temples were suddenly beating hard.

Helena did not turn. She stood by the table, trifling with some little detail of spoon or napkin, and her down-bent profile was presented to Brown's gaze. As he stared at it a sudden vivid wave of colour swept over her cheek, such an evidence of inner feeling as he had seldom observed in her before, who usually had herself so well in hand.

He came close and stood looking down at that

rich-hued cheek, the soft waves of her dusky hair drooping toward it.

"What does this mean?" he said, unsteadily and very low. "This can't be just to make me go mad with longing. For that's what I shall do if I look long at you like this, here in my home—*you*, looking as if—as if—you belonged here!"

He saw her hand tremble as it touched the violets in the bowl, arranging them. It was a very beautiful hand, as he well knew, and he saw with fresh wonder that there were no rings upon it, where rare and costly ones were wont to be.

There was silence for an instant before her reply. Then she turned and looked up, full into his face.

"May I belong here?" she said, very gently.

"Do you want to?"

"Yes."

"You are willing to leave it all—for me?"

"Yes."

"Ought I to let you?"

His questions had been rapid, breathless, his eyes were searching hers deeply. He was very near, but he had not put out a hand to touch her. Yet no woman, seeing him as he stood there, could feel herself the one who wooed, even though she led him on.

She looked away for an instant, while her lips broke into a little smile of wonder at his control of himself. No need to tell her how she drew him—she knew it with every fibre of her. Then she let him have her eyes again.

"Do you think you can help letting me?" she said, and lifted her face with that adorable, irresistible movement which tells its own story of its own desire.

"No!" His voice shook. "Thank God, I don't have to try any longer."

It was no passive creature he took then into his eager arms, it was one who raised her own with the rush of self-abandonment which made his joy complete. Long as he had loved her he

had not dreamed of her as ever giving herself to any lover so splendidly. If he had dreamed—he realized with a strange feeling at the heart—he could never have withstood. . . .

It was to be hoped that Mrs. Brainard, in the other room, had found a book upon the table which interested her or, hungry for food as she had professed herself to be, she must inevitably have found the time pass slowly before she was summoned to her promised supper.

Out in the old, dark, oak-walled kitchen, Brown was still putting questions. He had placed his lady in a chair, and he sat on a little old-fashioned "cricket" before her, one that he had found in the house when he came and had carefully preserved for its oddity. It brought him just where he could look up into her eyes. One of her hands was in both his; he lifted it now and then to his lips as he talked. The packages of eggs and lettuce and bakery cakes stood untouched and forgotten on the table. If Helena

remembered to be hungry, it was not worth the spoiling of this hour to demand to be fed.

"Can I possibly make you comfortable here?" was one of his questions.

"Don't you think I look as if I might help you make us both comfortable?" was her answer.

Brown looked at the plain little white blouse, at the simple blue serge skirt, then on down to the foot which showed below the hem of the skirt.

"Is this the sort of shoe that working-women wear?" he inquired skeptically.

Helena laughed. "Neither Mrs. Brainard nor I could bring ourselves to that," she owned. "And since you and I are only to play at being poor——"

"We can afford to keep you in fine shoe leather? Yes, I think we can. But you are going to miss a world of things you are used to, my queen—and not only a world of things—the world itself."

"I know. But—I tried living in my world without you—and I failed."

He made an inarticulate exclamation, expressive of great joy, and followed it with the age-old demand: "Tell me when you became willing to come to mine."

"The night you were in town."

"What? Not at Atchison's dinner?"

"Yes. I would have come with you then. I would have come with you from the singing of that song."

"But you—you let me think you wanted me to come back!"

"I am only human. I wanted you to come back. But—I wanted you to refuse to come! If you hadn't refused——"

"Yes——"

"You wouldn't have towered as high for me as you do now. I might have loved you, but—perhaps—I shouldn't have—adored you!"

The last words came in a whisper, and again

the wonderful colour poured itself over her face. Brown, at the sight, bent his head upon her hand, and she put her other hand upon his heavy hair and gently caressed it. When he lifted his head his eyes were wet.

"Oh, but I don't deserve that," he murmured brokenly, and put up his arms and drew her down to him. Soon he spoke with solemnity.

"Darling, you are not making this great sacrifice wholly for me? You love—the One I try to serve? You will be glad to serve Him, too, with me?"

"Yes, Donald. But I love Him, I think, through you. I hope to reach your heights some day, but you will have to lead me there."

They remembered Mrs. Brainard at last, and they remembered that Helena, also, had had nothing at all to eat since the hour for afternoon tea. Brown flung open the door into his living-room, his face aglow, and stood laughing at the sight of Mrs. Brainard's posture in his red rock-

ing-chair. As if exhausted by the tortures of fatigue and starvation she lay back in an attitude of utter abandonment to her fate, and only the gleam of her eyes and the smile on her lips belied the dejection of her pose.

"It's a shame!" he cried, coming to her side. "Or would be if—you hadn't aided and abetted it all."

"Are you happy, Donald dear?" asked the lady, sitting up and reaching up both hands to him. "Ah, yes; I only need to look at you!"

"So happy I don't know what I'm doing, you kind, wise friend."

"Wise? I wonder if I am. What will they all say to me, I wonder, when they know the part I've played? Never mind! Is Helena happy, too? I hope so, for the poor girl has been through the depths, bless her!"

"Come and see!" And with his arm about her, Donald led her out into the kitchen.

Helena came forward. "Dearest lady, will

you stay and have supper with us?" said she with quite the air of the proud young housewife, and Brown laughed in his delight.

"Had I better stay?" inquired Mrs. Brainard, laughing with the man at her side, while both regarded the figure before them with eyes which missed no note in the appeal of her presence in that place.

"Oh, yes, indeed. We've plenty and to spare. Donald paid a visit to the corner grocery not long ago, and we've new-laid eggs, and radishes and all. Do stay!"

"I think I will." And Mrs. Brainard took the radiant face between her soft, white, ringless hands and kissed it as a mother might.

In no time at all the hour had come for the visitors to go to their train. In spite of their protests Brown would have a cab come for them, though it took him some minutes to get one in a quarter of the city where such luxury was rare.

"Time enough for self-denial," said he as he

took his place facing them. "Let me play I'm a man of affluence again—just for to-night."

"I'm afraid, Don, you'll always be tempted to call cabs for your wife," Mrs. Brainard said, and suppressed a bit of a sigh; for, after all, she knew what the future must cost them both, and she herself would miss them sadly from her world.

But it was Helena who silenced her. "When he walks, I'll walk," said she. "Haven't I been in training for a year—even though I didn't know why I was training?"

"I think we've both been in training for the year," said Brown. "Even though we didn't know—God knew—and when He trains—then the end is sure!"

When he had put them in their car, and had taken leave of them with a look which he found it hard to tear away, plain and unpretentious travellers though they were that night, he went striding back through the April midnight to the

little old house the Englishman had built so long ago.

As he let himself in, Bim came tearing to meet him. The firelight was still bright upon the hearth, and Brown sat down before it, leaning forward to look into the glowing coals with eyes which saw there splendid things. The dog came close and laid his head on Brown's knee, and received the absent-minded but friendly caress he longed for. Also, with the need for speech, Bim's master told him something of what he was thinking.

"The look of her, Bim, boy, in those simple clothes—why, she was never half so beautiful in the most costly things she ever wore. And she's mine—mine! She's coming here—next month, Bim, to be my wife! Can you believe it? I can't—not more than half. And yet, when I remember—remember——

"And it seemed hard to me, Bim—all this year—my life here. I thought I was an exile—I,

with this coming to me! *O God—but You are good to me—good!* How I will work—how we will work—*we*——"

He got up, presently, and as he stood on the hearth-rug, about to leave it for his bed, a whimsical, wonderful thought struck him.

"I'll never have to borrow little Norah Kelcey any more, for the want of something to get my arms about. Instead—some day—perhaps—*O God, but You are good!*"

THE TIME OF HIS LIFE

THE TIME OF HIS LIFE

"Dot, do you remember Kirke Waldron?"

Dorothy Broughton, daintily manipulating her breakfast grapefruit, her shapely young arm showing interesting curves through the muslin and lace of her morning gown—made by her own clever fingers—looked up at her brother Julius. He was keeping her company at her late and solitary breakfast, sitting casually on the arm of his brother-in-law's empty chair, his long legs crossed, his arms folded upon his chest. His bright eyes surveyed his sister as he spoke, from the crown of her carefully ordered hair to the tips of her white shoes—he could see them from his position at one side, and he observed that they were as white and as

fresh as her gown. That was one of the things Julius heartily approved of in his pretty sister —her fastidiousness in such matters. He was fastidious himself to a degree; nothing more correct in its way than his own morning attire could have been imagined.

"Waldron?" Dorothy repeated. "That tall, solemn boy who used to stumble over himself on his way to the blackboard?"

"And then had the rest of the class looking like a set of dough-heads while he covered the blackboard with neat little figures that always came out right; a perfect shark at 'math.' Yes, he's the one. Five classes ahead of us then—fifteen now. We aren't in it, any of us, with Kirkie Waldron these days."

"I've never heard nor thought of him since then," averred his sister. "Do you mean he's made something of himself? I should never have thought it."

"No, you'd never have thought it, because

he stumbled over his own feet when he was a kid. Well, let me tell you it's the only thing he's ever stumbled over. He's just been taken into the office of Haynes and Ardmore, consulting mining engineers, and everybody says that'll mean a partnership some day. And that brings me to my point. He hasn't taken a day's vacation for two years. Day after to-morrow he sails for South America to stay six months, looking after the development of a new mine down there in Colombia. He can take to-morrow for a holiday, and I've asked him out—with Bud's permission. And I want you to help me give him the time of his life."

"Me?" Dorothy opened her brown eyes. "Oh, but I can't give you to-morrow! The bridal party's going on an all-day motor trip."

Julius ran his hand through the crisp, half-curly locks of his black hair. "Cut it out. You don't need to be on every last one of their junketings. Get 'em to let you off for to-morrow."

"I can't possibly. I'm to be maid of honour, you know. Irene would never forgive me, nor —some of the others."

Julius frowned. "See here, you're not letting Ridge Jordan get any headway with you, are you? If you are you'd certainly better make him take a day off while you see what a real man is like. After you've had a good look at Kirke Waldron you'll be ready to let Tom Wendell and Ridge Jordan and the rest of those bridal party men go to thunder. I don't suppose Waldron was ever an usher or best man at a wedding in his life, but I tell you he'll make every one of those little society men look like copper cents, just the same."

Dorothy rose from her chair. Her brown eyes surveyed her brother from between heavy chestnut lashes, and just now they were very haughty eyes. Her curving, crimson lips were scornful. "I find it difficult to believe," she observed, "that a boy whom I particularly

detested, one of the most awkward, solemn-faced, uninteresting boys I ever saw in my life, can have blossomed into such a wonder. As for Ridgeway Jordan, I like him very much. He may be a society man—which is no crime, I believe—but he is also making quite as good, in his way, as your friend, Mr. Waldron. And I certainly am not going to throw over an engagement as binding as this one to give anybody 'the time of his life.'"

She walked out of the room, cancelling the effect of her haughtiness by turning to throw back a smile at her brother, as ravishing a smile as if he were no brother at all.

Her sister, Mrs. Jack Elliot, entering in time to glance curiously from Dorothy's smile to Julius's scowl, inquired of Julius what might be the matter.

He shook his head. "I don't like the symptoms. She takes it more and more seriously when I hit Ridge Jordan in any way. I like

Ridge myself, but I wouldn't see Dot marry him for a good deal."

"I don't believe there is the least danger," his elder sister replied. She looked a mere girl herself. She was immolating herself just now, as was everybody else in the suburban town, on the altar of the Clifford-Jordan bridal party. That the dinners and dances, drives and luncheons might proceed without hindrance many family schedules were being upset. Mrs. Jack's one anxiety at present was to have her charming sister's bloom remain unworn by fatigue. Thus far Dorothy was holding out better than any of the other bridesmaids. "Her colour was just as good as ever, wasn't it?" Mrs. Jack murmured absently, preparing to remove Dorothy's fruit plate. "I don't believe she ate a thing but fruit," she murmured.

"Best thing she could do. After the stuff she undoubtedly got away with at midnight her only salvation's a light breakfast. As to her

colour, I enriched it," he explained grimly, "by mentioning my feeling about Ridge. If I thought, after all the attentions that girl has had, that she'd take Ridge Jordan—with all his money! Dot's no girl to care such a lot about money. It's this crazy bridal-party business that's upset her, I'll go you! The thing's contagious. Lord Harry! I don't know that I could look long at Irene and Harold myself without getting a touch of it."

"A touch! You and Sally?" Mrs. Jack smiled.

"Oh, well; that's different." Her brother thrust his hands into his pockets and walked over to the window. "Entirely different. Sally and I were intended for each other from the beginning; everybody knows that. But now—what in thunder am I going to do with Waldron? Tell me that. I've got him to come down here expressly to meet Dot. Of course I didn't tell him so; he's not that sort. And now she's

off for all to-morrow with that confounded bridal party."

"Can't he come some other time?"

"I should say not; certainly not for months. He's off to South America for a long stay—has this one day to himself. You see it wasn't till I met him yesterday that I realized what the fellow had become; and then it came over me all at once what it might mean to have him meet Dot just now. I'm no matchmaker——"

"I should say that is just what you are!"

"No; but—'There is a tide,' you know. And Dot certainly has me worried to death over Ridge Jordan."

"But, Julius"—Mrs. Jack's voice took on a tinge of anxiety—"we've always thought well of Ridge. I don't just see——"

"I know you don't. He's not the man for Dot. I want a real man for her. I've got him. Wait till you see Kirke!"

"You seem to think it's very simple——"

"By George, I think it is! I know how he felt about her when she was a youngster: adored the ground she walked on. She never looked at him. I tell you she'll look at him now; he's worth looking at."

"If he's so fine looking he may be engaged to some other girl."

"He's not. I made sure of that," declared Julius, audacity gleaming in his eyes as usual. "Besides, I tell you, he's not that sort. He's no matinee idol for looks; maybe you wouldn't even call him good looking. I do; he's got the goods in his face, handsome or not. I tell you he's a real man. Dot hasn't seen one yet. I'll make her see Kirke—somehow. You wait."

He marched away, head up, eyes thoughtful, lips pursed in a whistle.

Next morning, when three luxurious motor cars stopped at Mrs. Jack's door, Julius was lounging on the porch. It was his Senior vacation; he could be forgiven for lounging. In his

flannels, hands in pockets, he strolled down the steps with his sister to see her off, though Ridgeway Jordan was escorting her devotedly. He surveyed her, as he followed her, with brotherly pride.

"That sister of mine has all the rest of them beaten at the quarter-mile," was his inward reflection. "Not much money to do it on, but she certainly knows how to get herself up to look as if she'd just walked out of a tailor's box and a milliner's bandbox. Made that stunner of a hat herself, I'll wager. Fresh as a peach, her face, too. The others look a bit jaded."

Along with these inner comments he was keeping up a running fire of talk with two of the bridesmaids, whom he knew well. His bright black eyes, however, noted that Dorothy's place in the first car was next that of Ridgeway Jordan, and that the face of that young man was soberer than usual.

"Bad sign," he reflected as he turned away, after a hot-and-heavy exchange of banter with certain of the men as the car prepared to start. "When a chap begins to look solemn, sitting beside a girl you know he's in love with, you can be sure he has it on his mind to have it out with her before the day is over. If I could have just got Kirke to her yesterday! Ridge may do it any time now; I can see it in his eye—and she may take him. I don't know what's got into Dot. A month ago she'd have laughed at the idea of marrying him; but now I can't be sure of her. It's this idiotic bridal hysteria that's got her in its grip. By George, she *shan't* take him!"

An hour later, in his brother-in-law's trap, Julius drove to the station to meet his guest. Kirke Waldron, descending from the train, found his old schoolmate, younger than himself, but well remembered as the imp of the High School, waiting for him on the station platform.

"Mighty glad to be sure of you," Julius declared, shaking hands. "Until I actually caught sight of you I was still expecting a wire saying you couldn't afford even the one day."

"The coast is clear," Waldron answered, returning the grip with equal vigor. "I closed every account at midnight and have my one day as free as air."

"The question is," Julius lost no time in beginning, as the two walked along the trim, flower-bordered suburban platform toward the waiting trap, "what sort of a day do you want? Outdoors, of course; no question of that in hot weather. But—with people or away from them? I can take you to my sister's for luncheon; to tell the truth, she's counting on that. But afterward I have a little plan to carry you up into the mountains to a place I know for an all-afternoon tramp and a dinner at the best little inn in the country. Back in the late evening, a dash down to our river and a swim by

moonlight. How does that programme suit you?"

"It's great," agreed Kirke Waldron decidedly. "Nothing could suit me better. Vacation, to me, means outdoors always. And it's a long time since I've done any tramping in the home State."

"I knew you weren't one of the hammock-and-novel vacation sort," Julius said as he put his new-old friend into the trap. "I'm not myself. Though"—he confessed with honesty—"I have been known to sit with my heels in the air for a longer consecutive period than you've ever done if all your sittings were lumped together."

"What do you know as to where I've kept my heels?"

"On the ground, planting one before the other without rest, day in and day out, ever since I first knew you. That's why you're where you are; it doesn't take a soothsayer to tell that."

Waldron laughed. "You're a flatterer," he said.

Julius shook his head. "Not a bit of it. It's written all over you. If I got caught in the middle of an earthquake anywhere, and the ground stopped shaking and I looked around me to find out what to do next, and my eye fell on you out of hundreds bunched around me, I should simply—follow you out of the mess!"

"That's a great tribute," Waldron admitted, "from a fellow whom I used to know as the cleverest at getting himself out of scrapes of all the boys who were resourceful in getting into them."

"Having exchanged large-sized bouquets," Julius observed with sudden gravity, "we will now drive home. Do you know I'm mighty sorry my sister Dorothy isn't there? You remember her, do you?—or maybe you don't. She was just a 'kid' with a couple of long tails of hair down her back. My second sister,

Barbara—we call her 'Bud'—was in your class, I believe. She remembers you all right; says she was tremendously impressed by the way you slew the fractions on the blackboard. Bud married Jack Elliot, as I told you yesterday; and a great old boy he is, too, for a brother-in-law."

Discoursing of his family, with occasional mention of his sister Dorothy, Julius took his friend to the Elliot home. Mrs. Jack, fresh and charming, made them welcome. Jack himself, by some happy chance, had been able to come out for luncheon, and the three men found each other thoroughly congenial.

After luncheon Julius contrived a chance to exchange a brief colloquy with Mrs. Jack on the subject of the guest.

"What do you think of him, Bud? Pretty fine sort to have developed from the grub who did the stunts with fractions, with his freckled face turning lobster colour because you girls were looking at him?"

"I can't believe he's the same," Mrs. Jack whispered, looking through the open window at the figure on the porch outside, its side turned toward her. "I haven't seen a man in a long time with so much character in his face. He's not exactly handsome, but—yes, I certainly do like his face very much. I wish—I really wish Dot were here."

"Oh, no, not at all!" Julius objected. "Dot's satisfied with Ridge Jordan, or thinks she is. So are you."

"I have always liked Ridge," Mrs. Jack insisted; "but—well, Mr. Waldron is quite another type."

"Yes, quite another," Julius murmured, and returned to the porch.

Before the two took the train for the mountains Julius managed to let Waldron see a photograph of Dorothy. As a matter of fact, photographs of Dorothy were all about the house, but in Julius's own room hung one which

the brother considered the gem of them all. It showed one of those straight-out-of-the-picture faces which are sometimes so attractive, the eyebrows level above the wonderful eyes, the lips serious and sweet, the head well poised upon the lovely neck, the whole aspect one of youth unconscious of its charm, yet feeling a subtle power of its own.

Waldron, his attention called to the photograph, surveyed it with a quiet comment: "I should have known she would look like this when she grew up"; and turned away without undue lingering. Yet Julius was satisfied that Waldron would know the face again when he saw it, as it was intended that he should.

It was a journey of an hour and a half by rail up into the mountain resort where, by certain artfully veiled investigations, Julius had ascertained that the bridal party would stop for dinner. Scheming joyously, he led his companion from the train at a station several miles

from Saxifrage Inn, alighting at a mere flag station in the midst of a semi-wilderness. The promised tramp began without the knowledge of the guest as to where it was to end or hint as to what might be found there.

Coats over their arms, the two young men swung away upon the trail—a wide, much-used trail, which could be followed without difficulty. The warm summer air was fragrant with the scent of balsam, pine, and fern; pine needles carpeted the path; faint forest sounds came to their ears—the call of a loon from a distant lake, the whirr of a partridge, the chatter of a squirrel, the splash of falling water. Waldron took off his straw hat and tucked it under his arm, baring his forehead to the spice-laden breeze that now and then filtered through the forest, stirring languid leaves to motion.

"Ah, but I'd like to be just setting out on a fortnight of this!" he breathed. "Dressed for the part, a pack on my back—or a canoe.

When I was a boy I used to go on long canoeing trips, following our river to its mouth. I don't like the tropics as well as I do the temperate zones."

"If you weren't such a tremendous grind you would do it now," Julius offered. "A fellow needs a vacation, now and then, if he's to keep in shape."

Waldron glanced at him, smiling. "So he does. But somehow I've managed to keep in shape. I inherit from my father a fairly tough constitution, and also the love of work, the seeing my job through to the finish without loss of time. I suspect that's what keeps me going."

They fell into talk about Waldron's work.

In answer to Julius's questions Waldron told him a good deal about the work itself—little, as Julius afterward realized, of his own part in it. The miles fell away beneath their steadily marching feet, and in due season, by Julius's management, they emerged from the trail at

a certain rocky bluff overlooking the distant country, upon which was perched the small but county-famous inn where they were to have dinner.

A string of automobiles stood along the driveway, and among them Julius readily recognized the three with which he was familiar as those which had been conveying the Clifford-Jordan bridal party to and from its places of entertainment for the last fortnight. No sign of the party itself was to be seen upon the side piazzas which encompassed the inn. But this was easily understood. From some distance away the sounds proceeding from a shrubbery-screened point upon the bluff before the inn betrayed the presence of a company of revellers. This was as it should be. Even Julius Broughton's audacity was not to be carried to the point of forcing himself and his friend, uninvited, upon a set of young people already carefully selected and for the time being rigidly separated from

the rest of mankind by metaphorical white ribbons stretched to insure privacy.

Julius left Waldron upon the porch and went into the inn to ascertain, if might be, from the management where the bridal party would be dining. Learning, as he had expected, that a private apartment was devoted to their use, he went to the public dining room and selected a table. Being early he was able to secure one in an alcove, looking out through an open window upon the path along which the bridal party, returning from the bluff, would be sure to approach. To this he presently led Waldron and seated him so that he faced the path outside, the vista of distant countryside beyond. The young people of the Clifford-Jordan party were to dine at eight, and it lacked only a few minutes of this hour when they appeared down the path.

Julius had just given his order and leaned comfortably back in his chair when he caught

sight of them. "By George!" he ejaculated. "Well, well! so *this* is where they've come! Been mighty mysterious about where they meant to spend the day, but we've caught 'em. Started in the opposite direction this morning, too—just for a blind. You see there are a lot of practical jokers among Clifford's friends, and their attentions haven't been confined to the hour of the wedding itself. I say, recognize the girl in the lead with the bride's brother, that light-haired fellow?"

Drawing back so that he was concealed by the curtains of the window Waldron looked out at the approaching bevy of young people. Up the path they came, talking, laughing, shifting like a pattern in a kaleidoscope, gay, handsome, sophisticated, modishly dressed, unconventionally mannered, yet showing, most of them, the traces of that youthful ennui so often betrayed in these modern days by those who of all the world should feel it least.

Julius's brotherly eye rested upon his sister, as it had done that morning, with cool satisfaction. Some of the girls looked in disarray, hair tumbled, frocks rumpled, faces burned. Dorothy's simple white serge suit was unmussed, her hair was trim under her plain white hat with its black velvet band, her colour was even, her dark eyes clear. Although Ridgeway Jordan was bestowing upon her the most devoted attentions, his eyes constantly seeking—but seldom finding—hers, she was showing no consciousness of it beyond the little, curving, half-smile with which she was answering him. In a word, her brother felt, Dot was sweet—strong and sweet and unspoiled—fascinating, too, being a woman and not without guile. Didn't she know—of course she did—that it was just that noncommittal attitude of hers, amused and pleased and interested, but unimpressed by their regard, that drew the men like a magnet?

Behind Dorothy and young Jordan one of the bridesmaids, an extraordinarily pretty girl, was laughing hysterically, clutching at her attendant's sleeve and then pushing him away. He was laughing with her—and at her—and his eyes, all the time, were following Dorothy Broughton. It seemed to Julius, as the party came on, that most of the girls were behaving foolishly—and quite all the men. Perhaps it was because they had all seen so much of each other during these days and nights of merry-making that they had reached the borders of a dangerous familiarity. A little tired of one another most of them had become, it was more than probable. Against this background Dorothy showed easily the most distinction of them all; she looked in her simple attire, contrasted with the elaborate costumes of the other bridesmaids, like a young princess reigning over a too frivolous suite.

Kirke Waldron looked, unperceived, out of

his window, and Julius, turning his eyes from the picture before him, observed his friend. Waldron's face was not what might be called an expressive one; it was the face of a man who had learned not to show what he might be feeling. There was no mask there; only cool and balanced control, coupled with the keenest observation. But Julius imagined that Waldron's close-set lips relaxed a little as he stared at Dorothy.

The party came on into the inn; the sound of their voices and laughter died away. Some young people at a table near, who also had been looking out of a window, made various comments to which Julius listened with interest.

"Swell-looking lot. Wonder who they are."

"Must be the bridal party they have here to-night. Dining privately."

"Awfully pretty girls," was one young woman's opinion; "better looking than the

men. Why are the men in bridal parties never as good looking as you expect?"

"Bridegroom doesn't want himself cut out. He has no advantage of a veil and train; he has to stand out in his raw black and white and compete with the other men on his own merits."

"I wonder if that was the bride, that prettiest girl in front."

"Don't know. Probably. If she is, the chap's lucky who gets her."

Julius felt a desire to get up and explain that his sister was nobody's bride, and wasn't going to be anybody's until the right man came along. Instead he sat still and stared at his plate. As he had watched his sister coming toward him, with Ridgeway Jordan beside her looking into her face with that look of eager hopefulness, he had experienced a powerful longing to go out and lead Ridge away to some secluded spot and explain to him that he wasn't

good enough. It wasn't as if there were anything against young Jordan; there was certainly nothing specific. Julius found himself wishing there were.

Upon the bluff in the cool darkness the two young men spent the following hour, enjoying to the full the refreshing, woods-laden breath of the night air, their pipes sending up clouds of fragrant smoke and keeping them free from the onslaughts of the insects which otherwise at that hour would have been very annoying. From time to time Julius lighted matches and consulted the unrelenting face of his watch. They did not talk much; it was a time for silence and the comradeship of silence.

The station at which the train would stop was not a dozen rods from the hotel. Until the last minute, therefore, they could linger. But at half after nine Julius sprang up.

"Let's go back to the hotel and wait on the porch," he proposed.

The two paced back to the porch, which hummed with talk. The whole small company of the inn's few permanent guests was gathered there, obviously to see the bridal party when it should appear and take to its motors. There was not much to amuse hotel guests up here in the mountains; they could not afford to miss so interesting a departure.

From not far in the distance suddenly a whistle pierced the night air.

"I say, that's too bad!" cried Julius low to his friend. "I hoped they'd come out before you had to go and you could meet Dot. Just our luck!"

"We'd better be off," said Waldron, and he led the way. It was a flag station, as he had learned, and he could not afford to lose the train. It would be after midnight before he could get back to the city as it was, and he was to leave the city at nine in the morning for his long absence.

Someone was waving a lantern as they approached the station. The forest hid the track in both directions, but the roar of the nearing train could now be plainly heard.

Walking fast, a trifle in advance, Waldron suddenly turned and spoke over his shoulder: "I suppose my ears deceive me, but that certainly sounds as if it were coming from the wrong direction."

"Your ears do deceive you, of course," Julius responded. "All sounds are queer in the night. Still—by George! it certainly does seem to come from——"

The train, puffing and panting from its pull up the grade, now showed its headlight through the trees. There was no question about it, it was coming from the wrong direction, and therefore, unquestionably, was going in the wrong direction.

"Must be two trains pass here," cried Julius, and he ran ahead to the hotel hand who

was still waving his lantern, although the train was slowing to a standstill. "There's another train to-night?" he questioned.

"No, sir. This one's all the' is to-night."

Julius turned and looked at his friend. "Well, I certainly have got you into a nice scrape," he said solemnly.

"It looks like it," Waldron answered shortly. "The thing is now, how to get out of it. We must hire something and drive back—or to a station somewhere."

They debated the question. They hurried back to the office and interviewed the management, which shook its head dubiously. The little mountain resort was far from stations where trains could be had for the city fifty miles away. The inn had no conveyance to offer except one work team of horses and a wagon, guests invariably coming by train or motor. There were three automobiles out on the driveway, but they belonged to the bridal

party. There had been other automobiles, but they had all left soon after dinner, their passengers having come for the dinner only, and proceeding on their way in time to make some other stopping place by bedtime. There seemed to be no way to get Waldron back except to ask a favour of Ridgeway Jordan.

Kirke Waldron knit his brows when Julius made this suggestion as a last resort. "I certainly hate to ask such a favour in the circumstances," he said. "But it's a case of 'must.' I wouldn't miss that ship to-morrow morning for any sum you could name; I can't miss it."

"I'll call Ridge out," said Julius promptly, "or—well, good luck! here he comes."

Wheeling, he advanced to meet a slim young man who was hurrying down the wide staircase to the lobby. Jordan's first glance was one of astonishment, his second of suspicion. The reputation of Julius Broughton for mischief

particularly at times like these, was one not to be lightly overlooked. But Julius's air of earnestness was disarming.

"No joking, Ridge," he said. "Mr. Waldron and I wandered over here on a long tramp. Dot wouldn't tell me where you people were going. We meant to take the train at nine forty-five, but—well, you know timetables. It turned out to be an up train instead of a down train. It was all my fault. It wouldn't matter, but Mr. Waldron will miss a more than important engagement with a ship sailing for South America if he doesn't get back to catch the eleven-fifty to town. You see there isn't a conveyance here——"

But of course there was no need to explain further. Jordan was a gentleman, and even if he had doubted Julius there was no doubting the expression in the eyes of the man to whom Julius now presented him. Young Jordan knew a man of serious affairs when he saw one;

unquestionably he saw one now. He promptly offered seats in one of the cars.

Waldron expressed his regret that they should be obliged to force themselves upon a private party, and Jordan assured him that it would be a pleasure to serve them, although he said it with one more appraising glance at Julius. He added that he would take them in his own car, that being the only one which had two seats to spare. As Julius had noted this fact in the morning he was not surprised, only grateful that he had not had to scheme for this distribution of the company.

Jordan went to the desk and gave an order, then returned to his party upstairs.

Julius and Waldron retired to the porch.

Presently the party came trooping out, arrayed for the trip. Dorothy in an enveloping white coat, her hat replaced by a particularly effective little rose-coloured bonnet of her own clever manufacture, found herself confronted

upon the lantern-lighted porch, as she was about to step into the car, by her brother with a strange man at his elbow.

She looked straight up at him, as Julius presented him. He looked straight down at her, and for an appreciable period of time the two pairs of eyes continued to dwell upon each other. Until this extraordinarily thorough mutual survey was over neither said a word. The rest of the party, diverting themselves with the usual laughter and badinage—some of it of a recognizably sleepy character—took their places, and only those nearest noted the addition to the list of passengers. The other man and girl of Jordan's car were an engaged pair, absorbed in each other, an astute reason for his selection of them to accompany himself and Dorothy.

The rear seat of the great car easily held four people. Ashworth and Miss Vincent occupied two of the places; during the day Jordan and

Dorothy had held the other two. Ashworth had already handed in Miss Vincent. The two chaperons of the party young Jordan had throughout the day thoughtfully bestowed in the other cars.

"Put my friend beside Sis, will you, Ridge?" suggested Julius in his host's ear. "They used to be old schoolmates and haven't met for years. He's off to-morrow for a long stay. It's their only chance to talk over old times."

Jordan nodded; there was nothing else to do. He could joyfully have taken his friend Julius by the scruff of his neck and hurled him out into the night, if by some miracle he could suddenly have become that young man's superior in strength. But social training prevailed over natural brute instinct, and it was with entire politeness that he made this arrangement of his guests.

He then put Julius into the seat beside the chauffeur, and himself took one of the extra

folding seats, swinging it about to half face those upon the rear seat. In this manner he was nearly as close to Miss Dorothy Broughton as he would have been beside her—nearly, but not quite! To his notion there was all the difference in the world.

Kirke Waldron, understanding intuitively the position as come-between in which he had been placed in Ridgeway Jordan's big automobile by Julius's misreading of the railway timetable, and, as far as that part of the situation was concerned, wishing himself a hundred miles away, was also keenly alive to that which the gods—and Julius—had given him by seating him beside Dorothy. As the car hummed down the long trail from the inn he played his part with all the discretion of which he was capable; and he had learned many things since the days when he had fallen over his own awkward feet on the way to the blackboard. He talked a little with Dorothy—not too much; he talked

considerably more with Ridgeway Jordan—but not more than was necessary; the greater part of the time he was silent with the rest, as was most fitting of all in the summer moonlight and the balmy night air.

Dorothy, sitting beside him, reminded Julius, as from time to time he glanced contentedly back at her from his place beside the chauffeur, of a particularly demure kitten in the presence of two well-bred but definitely intentioned hunting dogs. She was very quiet, and only now and then he caught a word or two from her or the low sound of her attractive contralto laugh.

Just once, as the car whirled through a brightly lighted square in a small village where a country festival of some sort was in progress, he saw her take advantage of a moment when everybody's attention was caught by the scene, and look suddenly and absorbedly at Kirke Waldron's face in profile. But when Ridge

Jordan whirled about upon his folding seat, to call her attention to the antics of a clown in the square, she was ready for him with a smile and a gay word of assent. Julius laughed to himself. There was no question that Kirke's face, even in profile, was one to make Ridge's look insignificant. As for the man himself——

The car, rushing on through the summer night, its powerful searchlights sending ahead a long, clear lane of safety where the road was straight, but making the dark walls on either side resolve into black pockets of mystery where the curves came, approached one of those long, winding descents, followed by a second abrupt turn and a corresponding ascent, which are—or should be—the terror of motorists. All good drivers, at such places, hurling themselves through the darkness, sound warning signals, lest other cars, less cautious, be rushing toward them without sound of their coming.

Jordan's chauffeur, sending his car on down

the winding hill with hardly appreciable loss of speed, took this precaution, and the mellow but challenging notes of his horn were winding a long warning when the thing happened which was to happen. No accident, but the horror of one which comes so close that it all but seizes its victims, and leaves them weak and shuddering with what might have been.

Another car dashed around the lower turn, apparently not hearing the warning, or determined to ignor it, that no momentum with which to climb the steep grade coming should be lost. There was an instant in which the two drivers glimpsed each other out of the gloom of the unlighted curve; then quick action upon the part of both—lightning-like swerves to avoid the danger—two great cars rocking each on the brink of disaster, then righting themselves and running on into safety, no pausing to let any look back and ponder upon the closeness of the escape.

It was all over so quickly that it was like

the swift passage of a hideous thought, but there had been time for every soul in the car to look death in the face. And in that moment of peril there had been individual action—instantaneous—the action which is instinctive and born of character.

Julius himself had sat absolutely still beside the chauffeur, his muscles tensely bracing themselves for whatever might come. Ashworth had caught Miss Vincent, rigid with fear, into his arms. Waldron, throwing up the arm next to Dorothy to grasp her with it, felt her hand leap toward him, and with his free hand seized it in his own.

Staring straight ahead then they saw a strange thing, yet not so strange when one remembers human nature. Ridgeway Jordan had leaped to his feet and thrown one leg over the side of the car ready to jump, when, before he could complete the movement, the car righted itself and he sank back into his seat.

"Holy smoke!" Julius murmured under his breath, and glanced at the chauffeur.

That nearly imperturbable youth grunted in return. His hands were steady upon the wheel, but he laughed a little shakily.

Then Julius gazed back into the depths of the car. He could not see much, for the trees at this point were heavily overshadowing the road, but he made out that Ridge Jordan was sitting stiffly in his seat, with—strange to observe!—his head turned toward the front of the car. Behind him the other figures were still and silent. Julius guessed that nobody felt like speaking; he did not feel like it himself. It had been a little too near a thing to discuss at first hand.

Dorothy, her heart beating in a queer, throat-choking way, became conscious that her hand was held close and warm in another hand. An arm that had been about her, whose clasp she had not consciously felt but now remembered, had been withdrawn at the moment that the

danger had passed. But evidently—for the car had now gone a quarter of a mile beyond the crucial point and was running smoothly along a wider and less dangerous highway—her hand had been imprisoned in this strange grasp for some time.

She made a gentle but decided effort to withdraw it, an effort which secured its release at once but brought a low question in her ear:

"Are you all right?"

"I—think so," she murmured in reply.

It was not only the shock of the just avoided danger which held her in its grip, but the other and even more startling revelations which had come with it. Her head was whirling, her pulses were thrilling with the conflict of new and strange impressions. Since three minutes ago a new Heaven and an old earth had suddenly shown themselves.

The low voice pressed the question: "Not faint—nor frightened?"

She looked up at him then for an instant, although she could barely see the outlines of his face. "Not with you here," she answered breathlessly, with the impulse toward absolute honesty with which such an experience sometimes shakes the spirit out of its conventionalities.

He was like a statue beside her for the space of six of her heartbeats. Then his hand again found hers, pressed it in both of his, and let it go; and his quiet speech, the note deeper than before, came once more in her ear:

"I shall never forget that."

They went on in silence.

After a time Ridge Jordan turned about and made a carefully worded inquiry into the comfort of his guests, which they answered with as careful assurances that they were entirely comfortable and confident.

Ridge's voice was not quite natural. A biting shame was harassing him, whose only allevia-

tion was the possibility that nobody—or at least Dorothy—had noticed in the excitement of the part that he had played. He was saying to himself, wretchedly, that he had not known it of himself, that he could not have believed it of himself. How could he have done it—have had the impulse, even, to leap to safety and leave her behind? Had she seen—had she seen? Yet when, after a time, she leaned forward and spoke to him of her own accord, her voice was so kind, rang with such a golden note, that he felt with sudden relief that she could not have seen.

He turned about and began to talk again, growing more and more secure in his belief that at the supreme moment of danger nobody had thought of anybody but himself or herself, and by the time the car drew into the home town Jordan was serene again.

Under the first of the arc lights Julius took counsel with his watch. He swung about and

spoke tersely: "You and I'd better jump out here and make the station, Waldron. It's closer to train time than I thought. We're awfully obliged to you, Ridge."

"We'll go that way. It's only a block or two out of our course," Jordan insisted, eager to speed the parting guest.

The car drew toward the string of electrics which lighted the small suburban station at which Waldron had arrived in the morning. The glancing, silver-arrowed radiance illumined the whole interior of the car under its wide-spreading, hooded top. Waldron could see Dorothy's brilliant eyes, the curve of her lips, the rose colour in her cheeks repeating warmly the deeper rose colour of the little silk bonnet which kept her dark hair in order—all but one wild-willed little curly strand which had escaped and was blowing about her face. Dorothy, in her turn, could see Waldron's clean-cut, purposeful face, his deep-set eyes, the modelling

of his strong mouth and chin, the fine line of his cheek.

As they had looked at each other when they first met, so they looked at each other again before they parted. Yet between that meeting and that parting something had happened. It was in his eyes as he looked at her; it was in her eyes as for one instant, before she dropped bewildering lashes, she gave him back his look. It meant that South America was not so far away but that a voyager could come back over the same high seas which had conveyed him there. And that when he came——

"I'm grateful to you, Mr. Jordan," Waldron said, shaking hands beside the car, "more than I can say to you. You have done me a greater kindness than you know. Good-night—to you all!"

He went away with Julius without a glance behind after the salute of his lifted hat, which included everybody.

By some common impulse the rest of the party all looked after the two as they walked away toward the station door.

"Seems like an uncommonly nice chap," was Ashworth's comment. "I'll wager he's something, somewhere."

"He has a very interesting face," his fiancée conceded.

"Yes, hasn't he?" Dorothy agreed lightly, something evidently being expected of her.

"He may be the tenth wonder of the world," declared Ridgeway Jordan, springing in to take his old place beside her for the drive of an eighth of a mile left to him; "but I grudge him this hour by you. Jove, but I thought the drive would never end!"

Julius, after seeing his friend off with a sense of comradeship more worth while than any he had known, walked rapidly back, eager for a word with Dorothy. Quick as he was, however, she was quicker, and he found her locked into

her own room. By insisting on talking through the door he got her to open it, but there was not so much satisfaction in this as he had expected, because she had extinguished her lights.

"How did you like him?" was his first eager question.

"Very well," said a cool, low voice in the darkness. "Much better than the trick you used to carry out your wishes."

"Trick!" her brother exclaimed, all the angel innocence he could summon in his voice. "When you wouldn't tell me a word of where you were going!"

"You guessed it. It was abominable of you."

"Oh, see here! If I hadn't managed it you wouldn't have seen him—and he wouldn't have seen you."

"And what of that?" queried the cool voice, cool but sweet. Dot's voice, even in real anger, was never harsh.

"Well, what of it?" was the counter-question. "Can you honestly say you wish you hadn't met him, a real man like that?"

There was silence. Julius moved cautiously across the room, avoiding chairs as best he could. "Be honest now. Isn't he the real thing? And isn't Ridge Jordan——"

"Please don't talk about poor Ridge that way, Jule."

"Poor Ridge!" cried Julius. "Well, well, you didn't speak of him that way this morning. What's happened?"

"Nothing has happened. That is——"

He came close. There was a queer little shake in Dorothy's voice. She began to laugh then quite suddenly to cry. Julius came near enough to pat her down-bent head.

"Did that confounded close call shake you up a bit?" he inquired sympathetically. "By George! when I think what I let you and Kirke and everybody in for, starting earlier than they

meant and all that, so we were just in time to meet that fool in the worst place on the road——"

Dorothy looked up. To his astonishment she sprang to her feet and clasped him about the neck, burying her face on his shoulder. She began to say something into his ear, laughing and crying at the same time, so that all he was at length able to gather was that she didn't regret the close call at all, for it had shown her—had shown her——

Julius had not seen Ridge Jordan make his move to spring from the car, but he had felt it—felt Ridge's hand strike his shoulder, his knee hit his back. He had not taken in its meaning at the instant, but when he had turned about and seen Ridge sitting stiffly facing ahead it came to him what had happened at the crisis. He had wondered whether Dot had seen it. Now he knew. Not that she said it. In fact, she said nothing intelligible, but she held her

brother tight before she sent him away; and somehow he understood that Fate had helped him to show Dorothy her "real man."

Somehow she had known that Waldron would write. It was impossible to recall his face and not know that he was a man of action. He would not go away for six months and leave behind him only a memory to hold her thoughts to his. She wondered only when his letter would come.

Four times a day the postman was accustomed to leave the mail in an interesting heap upon the table in Mrs. Jack Elliot's hall. Dorothy, from the very morning after the trip to Saxifrage Inn, had found herself scanning the pile with a curious sense of anticipation. She wondered what Waldron's handwriting was like. She recalled his workmanlike little figures upon the blackboard, and made up her mind that his penmanship would be of a similar character, compact and regular. Another man would

have sent her flowers before he sailed. Instinctively she knew that Waldron would not do this; she did not expect nor wish it. But he would write—unquestionably. How would he write? That was the question which made her pulses thrill.

It was some time before the letter came, as she had guessed it would be. He had written on shipboard, and the letter came back to her from Greater Inagua, the first West Indian island at which his ship had touched. Coming in one September evening from a long walk through the hazy air, its breath fragrant with the peculiar pungent odour of distant forest fires, Dorothy found the letter on the hall table. She knew it was his before she saw the postmark; recognized, as if she had often seen it, the clean cut, regular lettering, the mark of the man of exactness and order, of the well-trained mind. Her heart leaped at sight of it, a heart which had never before really leaped at

sight of any man's handwriting. She picked up the letter and went away upstairs with it to her room. Here she locked the door.

She placed the letter upon her dressing-table and studied its envelope while she removed her dress, brushed and arranged her hair, and put on the frock she intended to wear for the evening; she was going with Tom Wendell to a small dance at the home of a special friend. She did not open the letter, but left it, unopened, propped up against a little pink silk pincushion, giving it one last glance as she switched off the light before closing the door.

On the evening of the Clifford-Jordan wedding Ridgeway Jordan, brother of the bride and best man to the bridegroom, had offered himself in marriage to the maid of honour, Dorothy Broughton. She had done her best to prevent him, but he had reached such a stage of despairing passion that he could no longer be managed and did the deed at a moment

when she could not escape. Being gently but firmly refused, he had declared his life to be irretrievably ruined and immediately after the wedding had flung himself out of town, vowing that she should not be bothered with the sight of the work her hands had wrought. When another long-time friend, Thomas Wendell, seized the opportunity of Ridge's absence to further his own claims to Dorothy's preferment, she, profiting by painful experience, had somehow made it clear to him that only comradeship was in her thoughts. Even on these tacit terms Wendell was eager to serve as escort whenever she would allow it.

On this September evening he was on hand early and bore her away with ill-concealed satisfaction. "I say," he observed suddenly in the pause of a waltz, "did you happen to have a fortune left you to-day?"

"Why, Tommy?" Dorothy's face grew instantly sober.

"Oh, don't turn off the illumination. I'm sorry I spoke. It was only that you somehow seemed—well, not exactly unhappy to-night, and I couldn't get at the cause. I should like to flatter myself that I'm the cause, but I know better."

"I must be a gloomy person ordinarily if there seems any change to-night. Don't be foolish, Thomas; I've had no fortune left me; I never shall have."

She felt not unlike one with a fortune, however, a fortune of unknown character about to be made known to her, as, shortly after midnight—Dorothy kept comparatively early hours when she went to dances—she opened the door of her room again. Her first glance was for the letter. There it stood as she had left it. More than once during the evening she had caught herself fearing that something might happen to it in her absence. She might find the letter gone—forever gone—and unread!

She smiled at it as she saw it standing there, but still she did not open it. She took off her dancing frock, braided her hair for the night in two heavy plaits, and slipped into a little loose gown of cambric, lace, and ribbon before at last she approached the waiting letter.

Why she did all this, putting off the reading of it until the latest possible moment, only a girl like Dorothy Broughton could have told. And even when she broke the seal it was with apparently reluctant fingers. It was so delightful not to know, yet to be upon the verge of knowing! But as soon as the first words met her eyes there was no longer any delay. She read rapidly, her glance drinking in the letter at a draught.

On Board S. S. "Westerwald," Off Greater Inagua
August 21, 19—

Dear Dorothy Broughton: The first time I saw you was the day you came to school for the first time. You wore a blue sailor dress with a white emblem on the sleeve, and your curly black hair was tied with

red ribbons. You did not see me that day—nor any other day for a long time. I was simply not in your field of vision. That year I was wearing my older brother's suit, and I had pressed him rather closely in inheriting it, so that it was none too large for me. I remember that the sleeves were a bit short. Anyhow, whether it was the fault of the suit or not, I had a a very indefinite idea what to do with my feet when they were not in action, and even less at times when they were. I recall vividly that there seemed to be a sort of ground swell between my desk and the blackboard, so that I never could walk confidently and evenly from one to the other. When by any chance I imagined your eyes were turned my way the ground swell became a tidal wave.

Once, just once, I was allowed to help you with a lesson. You were unable to make head or tail of a problem in fractions; I don't think figures were your strong point! Miss Edgewood began to show you; an interruption came along. I happened to be at her elbow—I had a sort of reputation for figures—she called on me to help you out. I remember that at the summons my heart turned over twice, and its action after that was irregular, affecting my breathing and making my hand shake. Luckily it did not upset my brain, so that I was able to make the thing clear to you. I dared not look at you! You did not get it at first and you stamped your foot and said: "But I don't see any *sense* to it!" I replied with a tremendous effort at lightening the situation: "Plenty of cents, and dollars, too!" At which you turned and gave me

a look—at first of pride and anger, then melting into appreciation of my wit, and ending by blinding me with the beauty of your laughter! We went on from that famously, and you saw the thing clearly and thanked me. I thought I knew you then—had made myself a friend of yours. Next day, alas! you passed me with a nod. But I never forgot what it might be like to know you.

We are four days out from New York—shall call at Matthew Town to-day. Another eight days will bring us to Puerto Colombia; then for the river trip which will take me within thirty miles of the camp in the mountains. When I am up at the mines I shall write again. My address will be Puerto Andes, Colombia, the port of the Company. If some day, when I go down the trail to send off my report, I should find a letter from you, I should go back the happier.

Meanwhile I am, Faithfully yours,
KIRKE WALDRON.

Dorothy went over and stood by the window, gazing out into the September night. It was an unpretentious letter enough, but she liked it—liked it very much. He had gone back to the beginning, picked up the one link between them in their past, the fact that they had been schoolmates. He had dared to remind

her of his poverty, of his awkward schoolboy personality, and of the fact that even in those days he had cared how she might regard him. Well, as for the poverty, she knew his family; knew that it was of good stock, that his parents were people of education and refinement, and that circumstances wholly honourable had been the cause of their lack of resources.

Should she answer the letter? How should she not answer it? Delay, then, lest he think her too eager with her reply? Why?—when she knew as well as he, and he as well as she, that the thing was already done, that the mutual attraction had been of the sort which holds steadily to the end. Yet, being a woman, she could not fling herself into his arms at the first invitation. And indeed he had not invited. He had counted on her wish to begin at the beginning and play the beautiful, thrilling play through to the end, as if it were not already decided how it was to come out. The fact

that she knew how it was to come out would not make it less the interesting play—in a world where, after all, strange things happen, so that no man may see the end from the beginning, nor count upon as inevitable an outcome which all the fates may combine to threaten and to thwart.

So she delayed a little before she wrote. She let one ship, two ships, sail without her message, so that it would not be at the first tramping of the trail into Puerto Andes that he should find the letter. When it finally left her hands it was a very little letter after all, and one which it could not be imagined would take three days to write—as it had!

DEAR MR. WALDRON: I think I know quite well that the little girl of the curly black hair, red ribbons, and blue sailor dress was a very audacious, pugnacious little person, and I wonder that you were willing to help her through the tangle of fractions as you did so cleverly. I well remember thinking you a very wonderful scholar, but you were so much older than I that I admit not thinking about you very much. It was like

that small girl to stamp her ridiculous foot; she has gone on stamping it, more or less, all her life. But I believe she has done some smiling, too.

It will be very interesting to hear from the depths of Colombia; school days are so far gone by I had to look it up on the map. Is it very hot there, and do you live on bananas and breadfruit? I don't mind showing how little I know, because then you may tell me about it. I am really going to read up concerning South America at once, so that I may be an intelligent if not a "gentle" reader.

Very good luck to you there,

Wished you by

DOROTHY BROUGHTON.

As promptly as the return mails could bring her a reply one came, although it was, of course, a matter of weeks. During those weeks Dorothy had not only "read up" on the subject of South America with especial reference to Colombia; she had also posted herself, so far as a general reader may, concerning the rather comprehensive subject of mining engineering. This knowledge helped her to an understanding of Waldron's next letter. He gave her a brief but graphic description of his surroundings in

a camp upon the mountains, reached by a trail of nearly thirty miles from Puerto Andes. Certain long-delayed and badly needed machinery had arrived at ten o'clock of the previous evening, packed over the trail by mules. This had been unloaded by three in the morning, and the engineers had been so glad to see the stuff at last that they had been unwilling to go at once to bed, tired as they were. The mail had come in by the same route, and it had been by the smouldering campfire of the early morning that Waldron had read his letter from Dorothy. "Such a very short letter!" he said of it, and continued:

Yet it was more welcome than you can guess. I had done a lot of speculating as to what it would look like when it came—if it came—and it looked not unlike what I had fancied. I was sure you wouldn't write one of those tall, angular hands, ten words to a page, which remind one of linked telegraph poles. Neither would you be guilty of that commonplace little round script which school-children are taught now, and which goes on influencing their handwriting all

their days. There would be character in it, thought I—and there was!

It made me long for more—that letter! I wonder if you have the least idea what it feels like to be off in a country like this, your only real companion another engineer. Splendid fellow, Hackett, and I couldn't ask a better; and the work is great. But there comes an hour now and then when there seems more beauty in one small letter postmarked "home" than in all the gorgeous sunsets of this wonderful country.

May I write often and at length? I can think of no happier way to spend the hour before we turn in than in writing to you. And if you will answer my letters, as you have been so good as to do with my first one, I shall have the most compelling reason of my life to watch the mails.

I want—as I wanted when a schoolboy—"to know you." I want you to know me. There is no way in which this can be accomplished for a long time to come except by letters. Won't you agree to this regular interchange? I don't mean that which I presume you mean when you say it will be "interesting to hear from Colombia." You mean, I suppose, a letter now and then, at the intervals which conventionality imposes at the beginning of a correspondence, possibly shortening as time goes on, but taking at least half a year to get under way. I want it to get under way at once! We can receive mail but once a fortnight at the best up here, and there are often delays. So if you answer my letters as soon as you get them I shall not hear from you too often. Please!

I am an engineer, you know; that means a fellow who is trained to action—all the time. If he can't get results fast enough by working his men by day he works them by night also—day-and-night shifts—and works with them, too, much of the time. In that way —well, samples taken from our south drift assay more than we had dared to hope a ton, but not till we got well in. The vein may pinch out, of course, but there are no signs of it. I expect it to widen instead, and grow richer in quality. So—if you'll forgive the miner's analogy—with another vein I know of—the finest sort of gold!

So the correspondence began. It was easy for a young woman of Dorothy's discernment to see that here was no case for a long-distance flirtation, if she had wanted one. From the moment when she had flung her left hand into Waldron's right, and that other moment when she had told him with absolute truth that she was not afraid with him beside her, he had taken her at her word. She could not play with him, even if he had been near her; far less now that thousands of miles separated them. She answered with a letter of twice the length of her

first one, a gay little letter, full of incident and her comments thereon. The reply came promptly, and this time it was a long one. He told her many details of the situation as it was developing in these new, extraordinarily promising mines; and she found it as fascinating as a fairy tale. But, of course, although she read these pages many times over, she read more often certain opening and closing passages. One ran like this:

Now to bed—and to work again with the dawn. While I am writing to you I forget everything about me. Natives may chatter near me; I don't hear them. My friend Hackett may come and fire a string of questions at me; he tells me afterward my answers wouldn't do credit to a monkey on a stick. I am lost in the attempt to put your face before me—your face as I saw it last. There was not much light in the car, but what there was fell on your face. I see rose colour always; what was it—the bonnet?—if they call those things bonnets! I see more rose colour—reflection? I see a pair of eyes which were not afraid to look into mine—for a minute; only for a minute—but I can see them.

The night grows cold. Even in the tropics the nights

may be cold in the mountains. My fire has burned down to a few coals. My bunk awaits me; I thought I was tired when I sat down to write. I'm not tired now—refreshed!

Good-night! Sleep well—up there somewhere in the North!

After this letter Dorothy Broughton went about like a girl in a dream.

Yet she was so practical a girl, had been so thoroughly trained to fill her days with things worth while, that she was able to keep up a very realistic appearance of being absorbed in the old round of duties and pleasures. She was leading a life by no means idle or useless. As for the happiness of it, she carried about with her a constant sense that something wonderful had happened, was happening—and was yet to happen—which made no task too hard for her newly vitalized spirit.

The day before Thanksgiving the arrival of a particularly thick letter from Colombia gave her a more than ordinarily delightful sense of

anticipation. Her brother Julius, at home for the annual festival, saw it upon the hall table three seconds before she did, and captured it. He withdrew from his breast pocket another letter in a similar handwriting addressed to himself. With an expression of great gravity he compared the two while Dorothy held out her hand in vain.

"Don't be in a hurry," he advised her. "There is a curious likeness between these two addresses—not to mention the envelopes—which interests but baffles me. The word 'Broughton' in both cases begins with an almost precisely identical B. The small t is crossed in almost exactly the same manner—with a black bar of ink which indicates a lavish disposition. The whole address upon your letter seems to me to bear a close and remarkable resemblance to the address upon mine. Another point which should not be overlooked: both are postmarked with a South American stamp,

a Colombian stamp, with—yes—with the same stamp. What can this mean? I——"

"When you are through with your nonsense——" Dorothy still extended her hand for her letter.

Julius sat down upon the third step of the staircase, his countenance indicating entire absorption in the comparison before him. He held the letters in one hand; with his other he made it clear to his sister that her nearer approach would be resisted. "There is one point where the likeness fails," he mused. "My letter is an ordinary one as to thickness; it consists of two meagre sheets of rather lightweight paper. Your letter, on the other hand, strikes me as extraordinarily bulky. Now there——"

"Jule, I'm busy. Will you please——"

"Just as I get on the trail of this thing you insist on diverting my mind," her brother complained bitterly. He held the two letters

at arm's length, continuing to study them while his extended hand kept his sister away. But she now turned and walked off down the hall.

He looked after her with a sparkle in his black eyes. "Sis," he entreated, "don't go. I need your help. Have you by any chance an inkling as to the sender of these curiously similar epistles?"

She turned. Her eyes were sparkling, too. She shook her head.

"I'll tell you what," cried the inspired Julius, "let's read 'em together, paragraph by paragraph. Look here, I dare you to!" he suddenly challenged her. "Mine first." Stuffing his sister's letter into his pocket he spread forth his own. "I suppose you always read the last page first," said he. "I've understood women do. So we'll begin at the last page. Listen!"

She would have left him but he had walked over to her and now held her by the wrist while

he began to read. It was impossible for her eyes to resist the drawing power of that now familiar penmanship.

In this way forty-two miles of trail were cleared from ten to fourteen feet wide, most of our efforts being concentrated on the grading, bridges, and corduroying. Four pastures were cleaned out, of about seven, six, and four cabullos each, or about twenty-three to twenty-six acres in all. These pastures were burned and grass has started in most of them. We built palm houses or shacks at each stopping-place. We feel pretty well satisfied with the trail. You must not get the idea that we have an automobile road, for we haven't, but we are now much better prepared to handle supplies and machinery.

Julius looked up. "Suppose yours is as thrilling as that? Now for a paragraph of yours. Shall I open it for you?"

But by a quick motion she escaped him and had the letter. She was laughing as she slipped it into some unknown place about her dress.

"Now see here," Julius persisted, following her up the stairs. "I have to look into this, as a brother. Judging by the bulk of that letter

it is not the first one from the same person. How long have you two been corresponding in my absence and without my permission?"

Dorothy turned and faced him. Her face was full of vivid colour, but her eyes were daring. "Since August."

"Hm! Does he write entertaining letters?"

"Very."

"Gives you a full report of his operations, I suppose, with a dip into the early history of the country and the result of his researches into the Spanish settlement."

"Yes, indeed."

"Ever touch on anything personal?—mutually personal, I mean, of course."

"Never."

Julius scanned her face. "He writes me," said he, "that instead of staying only six months it's likely to be a year before he can come North. The Company who picked him to go down and put this thing through has

decided to make a much bigger thing of it than was at first intended. Too bad, eh? Fine for him; but a year's quite a stretch for a chap who, as I recall it, went away with some reluctance—just at the last."

Dorothy met his intent eyes without flinching. "He is so interested in his work I should say it was not too bad at all," she responded.

She then was allowed to make her escape, while Julius went back downstairs, smiling to himself. "That shot told," he exulted.

In her room Dorothy opened her letter. If Julius's news were true she would soon know it. Out of the envelope fell a small packet of photographs, but it was not their presence alone which had made it so bulky. The letter itself was three times as long as her brother's.

Dorothy eagerly examined the photographs which had fallen out of Kirke Waldron's letter. They had been taken all about his camp in Colombia and the surrounding country, pictur-

ing the progress that had been made in the development of the mines. In one or two of the pictures, showing groups of native workmen, she made out Waldron's figure, usually presenting him engaged in conversation, his back turned to the lens. But one picture had been taken in front of his own shack with its palm-leaf thatching. He was standing by the door, leaning against the lintel, dressed in his working clothes, pipe in hand, looking straightforwardly out of the picture at her and smiling a little. The figure was that of a strong, well-built, outdoors man, the face full of character and purpose, lighted by humour. The steady eyes seemed very intent upon her, and it was a little difficult for her to remind herself that it was undoubtedly his fellow engineer and friend, Hackett, at whom he was gazing with so much friendliness of aspect rather than at her far-away self.

The letter, however, toward its close set her right upon this point. He had told her of his

decision to stay and see the full development of the mine through, in spite of the wrench it cost him to think of remaining a year without a break. Then, going on to describe the taking of the photograph, he had written:

The Company is very glad to get as much as we can send it of actual illustration of our labours, so we make it a point to snap these scenes from time to time. There is one picture, however, which was not taken for the Company. Hackett asked me to hold the lens on him for a shot to send to somebody up North there, so he went inside and freshened up a bit and came out grinning. I grinned back as I took the picture, and said I was glad to see him so cheerful. He replied that the smile was not for me—that though he had apparently looked at me he had really been looking through me at a person about as different from myself as I could well imagine.

It's a poor rule that doesn't work both ways, so I then took my place by the door of our palatial residence, and gazed—apparently—at Hackett's Indian-red visage. I found it entirely possible to forget, as he had done, the chap before me, and see instead—well—look at the picture! And please don't let those lashes drop too soon. When I imagine them they always do!

It was thus that the correspondence went on. Dorothy never replied directly to such

paragraphs as these, but she did send him, a few weeks after the arrival of the Colombian photographs, a little snapshot of herself taken in winter costume as she was coming down the steps of her home. It was an exquisite bit of portraiture, even though of small proportions, and it called forth the most daring response he had yet made:

I know you wouldn't want it pinned up in the shack, and it's much too valuable to risk leaving it among my other possessions there. So I carry it about in an old leather letter case in my pocket. I hope you don't mind. I'm a little afraid of wearing it out, so I've constructed a sort of a frame for it, out of a heavy linen envelope, which will bear handling better than the little picture. . . . You are looking straight out at me—at *me?* I wish I knew it! Won't you tell me—Dorothy? You can trust me—can't you? There are some things which can't be said at long distance; they must wait. I get to feeling like a storage battery sometimes—overcharged! Meanwhile, trust me—Dorothy!

But she would send him only this:

Of course I was looking at you. Why not? It's only courtesy to recognize the salutation of a gentle-

man disguised in working clothes, standing in the door of a queer-looking South American residence. Besides—he looks rather well, I think!

One April evening Mr. Julius Broughton, sitting comfortably in his room in a certain well-known building at a well-known university, was summoned to telephone. Bringing his feet to the floor with a thump, flinging aside his book and puffing away at his pipe, he lounged unwillingly to the telephone box. The following conversation ensued, causing a sudden and distinct change in the appearance of the young man.

"Broughton," he acknowledged the call.

"Broughton? This is Waldron—Kirke Waldron."

"Who?"

"Waldron; up from Colombia, South America. Forgotten me?"

"What! Forgotten you! I say—when did you come? Where are you? Will you——"

The distant voice cut in sharply: "Hold on. I've just about one minute to spend talking. Can you come downtown to the Warrington Street Station? If you'll be there at ten, sharp, under the south-side clock, I can see you for ten minutes before I leave for the train. I want to see you very much. Explain everything then."

"Of course I'll come; delighted! Be right down. But aren't you going to——"

"I'll explain later," said Waldron's decisive voice again. "Sorry to ring off now. Good-bye."

"Well, great George Washington!" murmured Julius to himself as he replaced the receiver on the hook and reinserted his pipe in his mouth, to emit immediately thereafter a mighty puff of smoke. "I knew the fellow was a hustler, but I should suppose that when he comes up from South America to telephone he might spend sixty or seventy seconds at it.

Must be a sudden move; no hint of it in his last letter."

He consulted his watch. He would have to emulate Waldron's haste if he reached the Warrington Street Station by ten o'clock. He made a number of rapid moves, resulting in his catching a through car which bore him down-town at express speed and landed him in the big station at a minute before ten. Hurrying through the crowd he came suddenly face to face with the man he sought.

Tanned to a seasoned brown, and looking as vigorous as a lusty pine tree, Waldron shook hands warmly.

But before Julius had more than begun his expressions of pleasure at seeing his friend again so unexpectedly Waldron turned and indicated a young man's figure in a wheelchair. "That's my friend and associate engineer, Hackett, over there. He's had a very bad illness and I'm taking him home. We'll go over and speak

to him in a minute. Meanwhile, I shall have to talk fast. First—is your sister Dorothy well?" The direct gaze had in it no apology for speaking thus abruptly.

"Fine," Julius assured him. "Haven't you heard from her lately?"

"Not since I sailed—naturally—nor for a fortnight before that. I came away very unexpectedly, sooner than I should have done but for Hackett, who needed to get home. But the trip combines that errand with a lot of business—seeing the Company directors, consulting with the firm, looking up machinery and getting it shipped back with me on the next boat. I haven't an hour to spare anywhere but on this flying trip to Hackett's home, which will take twenty-four hours, and I shall have to work night and day. And—I want to see your sister."

Again the direct look, accompanied this time by a smile which was like a sudden flash of sunshine, as Julius well remembered. Waldron

did not smile too often, but when he did smile—well, one wanted to do what he asked.

"Does she know?" Julius demanded.

"Not a word; there was no way to let her know except to cable, and I—have no right to send her cable orders—or requests. Broughton, as I figure it out, I have just one chance to see her, and that only with your coöperation—and hers. I don't believe I need explain to you that it seems to me I must see her; going back without it is unthinkable. I don't know when I may be North again. Yet I can't neglect Hackett or my duty to the Company."

"Then—how the dickens——"

"I shall be coming back on the train that reaches this station at two o'clock Saturday morning. It will go through your home city at midnight. Would it be possible for you and Miss Dorothy to take that train when it leaves Boston Friday night, and so give me the time between there and your station?"

Julius Broughton, born plotter and situation maker as he was, rose to the occasion gallantly. It tickled him immensely, the whole idea. He spent five seconds in consideration, his eye fixed on the lapel of Waldron's coat; then he spoke:

"Leave it to me. I'll have to figure it out how to get around Dot. You mustn't think she's going to jump at the chance of going to meet a man instead of having him come to meet her. She's used to having the men do the travelling, you know, while she stays at home and forgets they're coming."

"I know. And you know—and I think she knows also—that only necessity would make me venture to ask such a favour."

"I may have to scheme a bit——"

"No, please don't. I prefer not to spend the time between stations explaining the scheming and apologizing for it. Put it to her frankly, letting her understand the situation——"

Julius shook his head. "She's not used to it. She'll find it hard to understand why you couldn't stop off and get out to our place, if only for an hour."

"Then show her this."

Waldron took from his breast pocket a card, on which, in very small, close writing and figures, was a concise schedule of his engagements for the coming five days, and, as he had said, nights.

Julius scanned it, and whistled softly a bar from a popular song, "Now Do You See?" "Do eating and sleeping happen to come in on this anywhere?" he queried gently.

"On the run. It's this trip up into New Hampshire that's crowding things; otherwise, I might have managed it very well."

"Couldn't anybody else have seen Mr.—Hackett home?" asked Julius.

"No." Waldron's tone settled that and left no room for dispute. "There are some things

that can't be done, you know, and that's one of them." He glanced at the great clock over his head. "Come over and meet him."

Julius went.

A long, thin figure, wrapped in an ulster, reached out a hand, and a determinedly cheerful voice said, with an evident effort not to show the severe fatigue the journey was costing the convalescent: "Think of me as Sackett or Jackett or something. I'm no Hackett; they're a huskier lot."

"As you will be soon, of course," Julius broke in confidently.

"Colombia air is pretty fine, but New Hampshire air is better—for old New Hampshire boys," asserted Waldron. He nodded at a red-capped porter waiting near, and laid a hand on his friend's shoulder. "This chap is going to be all right when he gets where a certain little mother can look after him. Mothers and blood poisoning don't assimilate

a bit. And now we have to be off, for I want to get my patient settled in his berth before the train pulls out, and it's going to be called in about thirty seconds."

He turned aside for a final word with Julius. "I'm not asking too much?"

"Do you think you are?"

The two pairs of eyes searched each other.

"I know Miss Dorothy is an orphan; I know, too, that you are her only brother. You understand that I mean to ask her to marry me, if I can have the chance. I couldn't do it—on paper. If you approve the match—and I think you do or you wouldn't have planned quite so cleverly last July——"

"What?"

"You brought about that meeting, you know," said Waldron, smiling, with such a penetrating look that Julius felt it go past all defenses.

"How do you know I did?"

"By a certain peculiar twist to your left eyebrow when that train came in from the wrong direction. You forget that I went to school with you. I have seen that twist before; it meant only one thing."

"Well, I'll be—see here, it was after dark when that train——"

"The hotel hand had a lantern. You unwisely allowed its rays to strike your face."

Julius burst into a smothered laugh. "Well, you're a good one!"

"I'm glad you think so—since I'm asking of you this thing you so dislike to do!"

"I don't dislike it; I'm delighted to have the chance. I'll have her on that train if I have to blindfold her."

"Don't do that. Show her the card."

The two shook hands with a strong grip of affection and understanding. Then Waldron, wheeling the chair himself, took his friend Hackett away as carefully as if he were con-

voying a baby. Julius, after seeing the party through the gates, went back to his college rooms, his wits busy with the task which so took hold of his fancy.

Julius would have enjoyed scheming involvedly, but Waldron had been too peremptory about that to allow of a particle of intrigue. So, before he slept, he sent his sister a special-delivery letter knowing she would receive it in the morning. It stated, after describing the situation to her (with a few private and characteristic touches of his own), that he would call her up by telephone to receive her reply, and that he would go through the city on a certain afternoon train on which she was to join him. This plan would give the pair time for a leisurely dinner in Boston before meeting Waldron upon the ten o'clock train.

When he had Dorothy on the wire next morning he was not surprised that her first words were these:

"Julius—is it surely Julius? Well—I don't see how I can go!"

"Why not? Got the mumps—or any other disfiguring complaint?"

"Mercy, no! But—it can't be that it is necessary! He—he certainly could——"

"Did you read that schedule?"

Julius's voice had in it a commanding, no-compromise quality. He knew that this feminine evasiveness was probably inevitable; they were made that way, these girls; but he did not intend to let the time limit of an expensive long-distance call be exceeded by mere nonsense.

"Ye-es, but——"

"Now listen. We've got three minutes to talk; we've used thirty seconds already saying nothing. I'm going to be on that train. I'm going to have that little trip with Kirke, and if you don't have it, it will be pure foolishness; and you'll cry your eyes out afterward to think you didn't. He can't get to you; if he could

he'd do it; you must know him well enough for that if you've been hearing from him all these months. Now—will you be there?"

"Julius! I'm afraid I——"

"Will you be there?"

"Why—don't you think I—perhaps I ought to have Bud——"

"No, I don't. I'm all the chaperon you'll need for this affair. If you go and get another woman mixed up with it you'll lose half of your fun, for she'll be sure to forget she's the chaperon—you know Bud—and first you know you'll be chaperoning her. See? Will you be at the station? I'm going to hang up now in just fifteen seconds!"

"Oh, Jule—wait!—I——"

"All right! I'll telephone down for the seats. Good-bye!"

He was on the vestibuled platform of his car to meet her when his train passed the home city from whose suburbs she had come in.

His eager eye fell delightedly on the trimly modish figure his sister presented; he would be proud to take her back into his car. He knew just how two or three sleepy fellows of his own age, in chairs near his own, would sit up when they saw him return with this radiant girl. Dot certainly knew how to get herself up, he reflected, as he had often done before.

It was April and it was "raining cats and dogs" as Dorothy came aboard, but the blue rainproof serge of her beautifully fitting suit was little the worse therefor, and the close little black hat with the fetching feather was one to defy the elements, be they never so wildly springlike.

"You're a good sport!" was Julius's low-pitched greeting as he kissed her, the tail of his eye on one of his young fellow-passengers who had followed him to the platform for a breath of fresh air and stood with his hands in his pockets staring at the pretty girl close by.

"I feel like a buccaneer—or a pirate—or something very bold and wild and adventurous," she returned.

"You don't look it—except in your eye. I think I do see there the gleam of a desperate resolve." He bent over her devotedly as he put her in her chair, noting the effect on the young gentlemen who had been too slothful to leave the car, but who now, as he had predicted to himself, were "sitting up," both physically and mentally, as they covertly eyed his new travelling companion. "I admit it takes courage for a New England girl to start out to meet a barbarian from the wilds of South America, unchaperoned except by a perfectly good brother."

"If I could be sure the brother would be perfectly good——" she suggested, smiling at him as she slightly altered the position of her chair so that the attentive fellow-travellers were moved out of her line of vision.

"I'm sworn to rigorous virtue," he replied solemnly. "He attended to that for you."

Dorothy looked out of the window. She looked out of the window most of the way to Boston, so that the interested youths opposite were able to enjoy only the averted line of her profile.

Julius, however, took delight in playing the lover for their benefit, and his attention to his sister would have deceived the elect. The result was a considerably heightened colour in Dot's face, which added the last touch of charm to the picture and completed her brother's satisfaction.

Arrived in the city Broughton, '13, treated his sister to a delicious little dinner at a favourite hotel, which he himself relished to the full. He questioned whether she knew what she was eating or its quality, but she maintained an appearance of composure which only herself knew was attained at a cost.

He then escorted her to a florist's and himself insisted upon pinning upon the blue serge coat a gorgeous corsage knot of deep-hued red roses and mignonette, which added to her quiet costume the one brilliant note that was needed to bring out her beauty as his artistic young eye approved.

She protested in vain. "I don't want to wear flowers—to-night, my dear boy."

"Why not? There's nothing conspicuous about that, these days. More conspicuous not to, you might say. You often do it yourself."

"I know, but—to-night!"

"He won't know what you have on. He's slightly delirious at this very minute, I have no doubt at all. When he sees you he'll go off his head. Oh, nobody'll know it to look at him; you needn't be afraid of that."

"Please stop talking about it," commanded his sister. But she did not refuse to wear the red roses. No sane young woman could after

having caught a glimpse of herself in the florist's mirror. Even an indifferent shopgirl stared witn interest after the pair as they left the place, wondering if, after all, flowers weren't more effective on the quiet swells than on those of the dashing attire.

"We're to meet him on the train, not in the station," Julius observed, as he hurried his sister across the great concourse. "He has to make rather a close connection. So we'll be in our seats when he arrives. Or, better yet, we'll get back on the observation platform and see him when he comes out the gates. That'll give you the advantage of the first look!"

Their car, it turned out, was the end one and their seats at the rear end, as Julius had tried to arrange but had not been sure of accomplishing. Dorothy followed him through the car and out upon the platform. Here the two watched the crowds hurrying through the gates

toward their own and other trains, while the minutes passed. Julius, watch in hand, began to show signs of anxiety.

"He'd better be showing up soon," he announced as the stream of oncoming passengers began to thin. "It's getting pretty close to—— There he is though! Good work. Come on, old fellow, don't be so leisurely! By George, that's not Kirke after all! Those shoulders— I thought it certainly was. But he'll come— oh, he'll come all right or break a leg trying!"

But he did not come. The last belated traveller dashed through the gates, the last signal was given, the train began very slowly to move.

"He's missed the connection," said Julius solemnly. "But we'll hear from him at the first stop; certainly we'll hear from him. We'll go inside the car and be prepared to answer up."

But neither at the first stop nor the second

did the porter appear with a message for Mr. Broughton or for Miss Broughton, or for anybody whomsoever.

Dorothy sat quietly looking out of the window into the darkness, her cheek supported by her hand and shaded from her brother. She was perfectly cheerful and composed, but Julius guessed rightly enough that it was not a happy hour for her. She had come more than halfway to meet a man who had asked it of her, only to have him fail to appear. Of course there was an explanation—of course; but—well, it was not a happy hour. The red roses on her breast drooped a very little; their counterparts in her cheeks paled slowly as the train flew on. An hour went by.

Some miles after stopping at a station the train slowed down again.

"Where are we?" queried Julius, peering out of the window, his hand shading his eyes. "Nowhere in particular, I should say."

The train stopped, began to move again, backing; it presently became apparent that it was taking a siding.

"That's funny for this train," said Julius, and went out on the rear platform to investigate.

In a minute or two another train appeared in the distance behind, rushed on toward them, slowed down not quite to a stop, and was instantly under way again. A minute later their own train began to move once more.

"Perhaps he's chartered a special and caught up," said Julius, returning to his sister. "Perhaps he's made so much money down in Colombia that he can afford to hire specials. That was a special, all right—big engine and one Pullman. We wouldn't be sidetracked for anything less important, I'm quite sure."

He stretched himself comfortably in his chair again with a furtive glance at his sister. He sat with his back to the car, facing her. He now saw her look down the car with an intent

expression; then suddenly he saw the splendid colour surge into her face. Her eyes took fire —and Julius swung about in his chair to find out the cause. Then he sprang up, and if he did not shout his relief and joy it was because well-trained young men, even though they be not yet out of college, do not give vent to their emotions in public.

"By George!" he said under his breath. "How in time has he made it?"

But Waldron, as he came back through the car, was not looking at Julius. Dorothy had risen and was standing by her chair, and though the newly arrived traveller shook hands with Julius as he met him in the aisle, it was only to look past him at the figure at the back of the car. The next instant his hand had grasped hers, and he was gazing as straight down into her eyes as a man may who has seen such eyes for the last nine months only in his dreams.

"You came!" he said; and there were wonder

and gratitude and joy in his voice, so that it was not quite steady.

She nodded. "There seemed to be nothing else to do," she answered, and her smile was enchanting.

"Did you want to do anything else?"

There must certainly have been something about him which inspired honesty. Quite naturally, from the feminine point of view, Dorothy would have liked not to answer this direct and meaning question just then. But, as once before, the necessity of speaking to this man only the truth was instantly strong upon her. Deep down, evade the issue as she might by saying that she would have preferred to have him come to her, she knew that she was glad to do this thing for him, since the other had been impossible.

So she lifted her eyes for an instant and let him see her answer before she slowly shook her head, while the quick breath she could not

wholly control stirred the red roses on her breast.

"Now see here, old man," said Julius Broughton, "I know the time is short and all that, and I'm going to spend this next hour in the smoking-room and let you two have a chance to talk. But before I go my natural curiosity must be satisfied or I shall burst. Am I to understand that that gilt-edged special that passed us just now brought you to your appointment? And are you King of Colombia down there, or anything like that?"

Waldron turned, laughing. His browned cheek had a touch of a still warmer colour in it, his eyes were glowing.

"That certainly was wonderful luck," said he. "I reached the gate just as the tail-lights of this train were disappearing. As I turned away a man at my elbow asked if I minded missing it. I said I minded so much that if I could afford it I would hire a special

to catch it. He said, very much as if he had been offering me a seat in his motor, that a special was to leave in a few minutes and that it would pass this train somewhere within an hour. He turned out to be the president of the road. We had a very interesting visit on the way down—or it would have been interesting if it had happened at any other time. I was so busy keeping an eye out for sidetracked trains that I now and then lost the run of the conversation."

"If the president of the road hadn't turned up," suggested Julius, "would you mind saying what other little expedient would have occurred to you?"

"I should have wired you, begging you to give me one more chance," admitted Waldron. "I should have wired you anyway, if I hadn't felt that it would have spoiled my dramatic entrance at some siding. And I wanted all the auxiliaries on my side."

Julius went away into the smoking compartment forward with a sense of having had Fate for the second time take a hand in a more telling management of other people's affairs than even he, with all his love of pulling wires, could effect. He looked back as he went, to see Waldron taking Dorothy out upon the observation platform.

"It's lucky it's a mild April night," he said to himself. "I suppose it wouldn't make any difference if a northeast blizzard were on."

"Will it chill the roses?" Waldron asked with a smile as he closed the door behind them, shutting himself and Dorothy out into the cool, wet freshness of the night, where the two gleaming rails were slipping fast away into the blackness behind and only distant lights here and there betokened the existence of other human beings in a world that seemed all theirs.

"It wouldn't matter if it did," she answered.

"Wouldn't it? Can you possibly feel, as I

do, that nothing in the world matters, now that we are together again?"

Again the direct question. But somehow she did not in the least mind answering; she wanted to answer. The time was so short!

With other men Dorothy Broughton had used every feminine art of evasion and withdrawal at moments of crisis, but she could not use them with this man.

She shook her head, laying one hand against her rose-red cheek, like a shy and lovely child —yet like a woman, too.

He gently took the hand away from the glowing cheek, and kept it fast in his.

"I fell desperately in love with you when I was fifteen," said Kirke Waldron. "I carried the image of you all through my boyhood and into manhood. I saw you at different times while you were growing up, although you didn't see me. I kept track of you. I thought you never could be for me. But when we met last

summer I knew that if I couldn't have you I should never want anybody. And when—something happened that made you glad for just a minute to be with me, I knew I should never let you go. Then you gave me that last look and I dared to believe that you could be made to care. Dorothy—they were pretty poor letters from a literary point of view that I've been sending you all these months, but I tried to put myself into them so that you could know just what sort of fellow I was. And I tried to make you see, without actually telling you, what you were to me. Did I succeed?"

"They were fine letters," said Dorothy Broughton. "Splendid, manly letters. I liked them very much. I—loved them!"

"Oh!" said Kirke Waldron, and became suddenly silent with joy.

After a minute he looked up at the too brilliant electric lights which flooded the platform. He glanced in at the occupants of the

car, nearly all facing forward, except for one or two who were palpably asleep—negligible certainly. Then he put his head inside the door, scanning the woodwork beside it. He reached upward with one hand and in the twinkling of an eye the observation platform was in darkness.

"Oh!" breathed Dorothy in her turn. But the next thing that happened was the thing which might have been expected of a resourceful young mining engineer, trained, as he himself had said, "to action—all the time!"

THE END

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